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LORDS AND LADIES

Lords and Ladies

Stories

BY
R. MURRAY GILCHRIST

AUTHOR OF
“The Courtesy Dame,” “The Labyrinth,” “Beggar’s Manor,” etc.

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To
E. A. BENNETT
This Book
is Affectionately Inscribed.

C O N T E N T S.

	PAGE
THE MADNESS OF BETTY HOOTON	3
BUBBLE MAGIC	21
THE SHELTER OF LATHKILL	39
IGNIS-FATUUS	67
IN THE DEVIL'S CAVE	83
DRYAS AND LADY GREENLEAF.	107
THE GROTTO AT RAVENSDALE.	125
THE PRIEST'S PAVAN	153
YOUNG HAMILTON	169
THE COUNTRY WEDDING.	199
DOWN IN THE CLOUGH	229
A NIGHT ON THE MOOR	247
TRYPHENA GOES TO TOWN	271

**Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.**

The Madness of Betty Hooton.

THE MADNESS OF BETTY HOOTON.

WHEN the postchaise had borne old Basil Constable to the gate of the park that surrounded his ancient home, he alighted, choosing to revive the bitter-sweet of memories in solitude before passing to the house. The post-boy he bade drive on and instruct the house-keeper (of whose name he was as yet ignorant) to feed him, by the new master's orders, on the best of her larder. As soon as the horses, which had galloped all the last stage of fifteen miles, had passed out of sight in the hollow of the avenue he turned abruptly into a narrow alley of drenched lilacs, all white and heavy with bloom. An hour ago the heavens had closed their gates, and after a week of continuous rain, the sun, with a mighty effort, had thrust aside the heavy clouds and made the air hot as that of a glass-house.

The lilac walk led to a mausoleum with a green

copper cupola. Basil found the door ajar, and entered the chapel. There was a deep marble well in the centre, and on the eastern side a brass and ivory crucifix, before which stood a *prie-dieu* chair, covered with moth-eaten tapestry.

He knelt on the cushion and buried his face for a few moments; then rose and descended by a spiral staircase to the vault where his dead kinsfolk lay, with their feet against the circular outward wall of the well. Alabaster slabs elaborately gilt concealed the head-piece of each coffin save that of his brother, which looked oddly out of place in the gloomy light that came through the rusty gratings; for the crimson velvet was as yet unsullied, and the ornaments glistened as brightly as when they had left the silversmith's hand. A wreath of withered flowers, placed there for decency's sake by some hireling, lay softening upon the floor in front. The air was tainted with a charnel smell; flies with blue-shotten wings boomed to and fro.

As Basil stood glancing half-wistfully at the two empty receptacles that still remained, his hand moved involuntarily to his breast, and brought forth

the miniature of Betty Hooton, the girl whom he had loved forty years ago, and whose rejection of his suit had driven him to the East, there to enter commerce as a Smyrna merchant, and increase by a hundredfold a cadet's patrimony.

A black beauty; with thick ringlets, one shading either temple, the others falling to flushed plump cheeks and elegantly-curved neck. Eyes deep blue and languishing, a straight thin nose, upper lip bow-shaped—lower lip pouting like a ripe fruit, a chin made surely for no other aim than to nestle in a lover's palm.

She wore a bodice of oyster-coloured silk, cut so low that the dint of her back was visible; a crimson scarf drooped from her left shoulder. The right arm fell gracefully from a butterfly sleeve, caught in the middle with a garnet lozenge from which hung one great pearl and two sapphires. This trinket her mother, Anastasia Dornton, had worn in her stage triumphs, ere she had won, modestly and with good repute, the favour of, and soon enough the honourable conjugal estate with, Charles Hooton, seventh Earl of Longstone.

Basil had kept this, Betty's only gift to him, always hanging from a thin gold chain over his heart. She was the only woman he had ever loved, and her dismissal of him in his youth had killed all desire for womankind. Yet he had borne no malice, being a gallant gentleman, true as steel, and endowed with a good man's best gift—the power of bearing grief and physical pain without outward lament. Of the finest blood in England; but, as he was wont to declare, "an ugly devil—ugly as Punchinello!" But such as study physiognomy would have been vastly delighted with his countenance, for all its hooked nose and wry mouth, because of the truth and tenderness of the sunken grey eyes.

After a while he replaced the miniature and moved again to the staircase. "'Tis a vastly unwholesome place for the recalling of a woman's beauty," said he—"a beauty that, if she herself be not food for worms, must have long since faded in bleached hair and deep wrinkles!"

A profound depression overcame him as he thought of the past. He had felt but little affection for his

dead brother, who had ever wilfully wronged him, and the vicinity of his corse was not accountable for this melancholy humour. Perchance it was the sudden cessation of his journey, taken hurriedly, after four decades of work so strenuous that he had scarce allowed himself breathing space; perchance a stagnancy created by the utter barrenness of his present life. He had dwelt so entirely apart from his own country that, save for his colleagues in London town, he knew none with whom he could claim even the title of acquaintance. A wall of ice had risen between him and his youth; even the old pleasaunce in which he had spent his earliest years seemed almost as unfamiliar as though he had never beheld its vistas before.

The lean old man hurriedly retraced his steps along the alley and entered the avenue. Between each lichenèd elm stood the leaden statue of a pagan deity, brought from France more than a century ago. He remembered them as brightly gilded and stately in their erectness; but now all were covered with a purple bloom. Olympus was no longer Olympus—the gods and goddesses had lost all dig-

nity and grown pitifully ludicrous with age. Here and there a jagged gap showed on breast and shoulder; hanging from the thunderbolt of Jove and the quiver of Diana the paper-making wasp had fashioned her nest.

His melancholy increased to such a degree that he reached the great red-brick house and passed through the open doorway of the hall without casting his eyes over the frontispiece to discover what rack time had made. An elderly woman, whose head was covered with a crimped linen cap, stood curtseying beside the open gallery that led to the servants' quarters. She wore a mourning gown, and mittens of fine thread. A kindly, puckered-faced creature.

"I bid you welcome, Sir Basil," she said, "sure there's no liberty in taking so much upon myself, since I have served here from the time I were a wench grown."

The new master nodded courteously. "But that was long after I went away," he responded. "I have not seen Dalton Constable for forty long years."

"Dear heart!" cried the woman, "when you were a lad, I were still-room maid—young to the work,

but apt to improve. Please you to come this way, master—there's a meal ready served in the dining-parlour."

She conducted him to a vast saloon hung with Lely's portraits. A table at the further end, covered with damask and embellished with gilt glass and silver, was laid for his use. When he had taken his place, she removed the covers.

"We be under-served here, Sir Basil," she said. "For years and years, there's been none save myself and three wenches; and an old groom and keeper who sleep, gun by side, in the plate-room at night. I be Mrs. Humble, the housekeeper. I wedded Nathan—him that held the butler's post when you were young. God rest him—but he's in Abraham's bosom, where a man should rest! The last butler Dalton Constable ever saw; and he, poor soul, cooled in his linens two-and-twenty years ago."

Her garrulous officiousness warmed his heart; when she prepared to retire, he bade her stay longer and tell him of all the changes in the country—of who had died and who had been born. The ques-

tion concerning the woman he had loved he dared not ask.

Mrs. Humble was a devout woman, and her rigmarole was besprinkled with many pious ejaculations. Her master found it of pathetic interest. All the lads with whom he had hunted in his boyhood were dead and gone; some families were extinct, others had sunk into utter oblivion.

"There be none left," she said at last—"none but the ladies Anastasy and Betty Hooton, who still live in Camsdale, and ne'er quit the bounds of their own valley."

Basil looked up suddenly. "Unwed!" he said, half to himself. "How came it that two such girls should live unmated—two of the fairest creatures ever made?"

"Alack, master," replied the housekeeper. "Have you ne'er heard that Lady Betty lost her senses soon after your going, and that her sister e'er refused to budge from her side? A harmless, gentle madness, to be sure. Sir Digby, my late master (Heaven be his bed!), ne'er missed an evening without driving over in the chariot. 'Tis said as the playing blood

in her veins (madam, the countess, being a stage-actress), warms up at such times. Lord! the serving folk tell the tale that she hath a little theatre for puppets true as life, to do the same thing over and over again."

The old man filled his glass to the brim with generous wine. He held the reddened crystal above his head.

"Here's to her health!" he cried hoarsely.
"Here's to the health of Betty Hooton!"

Then he drank thirstily to the dregs, and, the tears gushing from his eyes, flung the glass against the mantel, covering the hearth with fragments.

"The chariot—the chariot," he said, "and at once, for I cannot rest until I have seen her!"

An hour later, in the blue parlour at Camsdale, after Basil had sat for some minutes in the midst of lac cabinets and tall Nankin vases and sandalwood screens, he saw Lady Anastasia, an ashen white ghost, attired in black paduasoy. She had entered so quietly that he was unaware of her coming until she laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Ah, Basil," she said mournfully, "you have come

at last! Come to two unfortunate women whose sole virtue is their remembrance of you."

He had not forgotten the courtly fashion of his young manhood; he raised her smooth be-ringed fingers to his lips.

"I did not know," he said. "Had I known, my coming had been a lifetime ago."

"But even then," she said, "'twould have been too late. When you went away, you bore with you all my sister's happiness."

The old man found the perfumed atmosphere intolerably oppressive; he moved to the oriel (where the moonlight and the dull flickering of haloed candles fought for supremacy), and threw open the lattice. Then he caught Anastasia's sleeve.

"I cannot understand," he said. "What does it mean? Betty drove me from her with harsh words—drove me—who have loved her all the days of my life!"

She covered her thin face. "Do not ask for the whole truth," she said. "One came to her with lies of you—brought forged proofs of your inconstancy—so cleverly wrought that she might not

doubt therein you had spoken of her as a wanton. And he, afterwards, feigning compassion, piqued her into a promise to wed."

"God!" groaned Basil. "My brother!"

"One summer eve, as they sat together in this very place, the demon of confidence came to him, and in the belief that her love was too great to be shaken, he told her of his baseness. And that night, as she lay stunned—silent as death—within my arms, her wits left her. . . . Ah, do not cry out, Basil, we are all old—and she has never known unhappiness since that hour. Her eyes became for him the eyes of a basilisk—from then, until the time of his death, he came here night after night—not missing once in all those years—to gaze upon her and listen to her fond talk."

"Let me see her!" he cried. "My Betty!"

"First must I forewarn you," she replied, "that she has not changed as you and I have changed. Time has used her with miraculous kindness—you will find her to outward view as beautiful as when you went away. And she hath a strange recreation—even since his death she hath not ceased to delight

in it. The puppet-stage, with which my mother solaced herself after her marriage, stands in the midst of the withdrawing-room; and thereon she plays with mannikins of wood her own piteous tragedy."

She took him by the hand and led him up the oaken staircase to a state saloon, at whose further end, beneath a canopy of purple velvet, stood the chair of the first Earl of Longstone, who had risen to greatness and riches as the lover of an unmarried Queen. The walls were adorned with tapestry of Flemish weaving; along the frieze vividly coloured beasts and birds and trees and hills capered to the music of Orpheus.

"'Tis nigh upon her time of entering," said Anastasia. "I pray you sit beside me afront her theatre, and together we will watch the play."

As she spoke, the hangings of a side-door were thrust aside, and Betty entered, light-footed and merry, and ran towards her toy. The old man's breath came in gasps; all the muscles of his heart were knotted together. For Anastasia had spoken sober truth, and her sister had lost no jot of her loveliness. Oh, it was strange—strange to see her

thus—it was unnatural and beautiful and hurtful. Still with her jetty ringlets, still in lustrous silk and crimson scarf.

She drew a taper from its sconce, and held it to the wicks of the footlights. This done, she confronted her audience, and began to speak in a whimsically tender voice.

"Good people," she said; "if you but have patience, you shall see here the story of *Love Betrayed, or the Virgin Deceived*, writ by—I know not whom, and played by little creatures with human souls."

She hastened to the back of the theatre, and began to jerk two little dolls—dressed as a swain and his sweetheart. The water burst from Basil's eyes, for the words each spoke were the words he and she had used in the days of their courtship. His affection was so wrought upon that he saw nought foolish in the stilted movements of the puppets as they strutted to and fro, with a background of gaily painted trees, and a foreground of terraced walk and mere.

The same soft, cooing voice for each—not a

sentence, not a word but he already knew by heart. . . .

Down tumbled the drop-scene, and the worker of the puppets came again to the front.

"The first act's ended," she said, "and now I will sing."

She took up an ancient lute that lay near by, and lifted the green riband over her ringlets. Then she sang, very fantastically, with sudden hushings and swellings, the second verse of a lyric of Aphra Behn's :—

"Because Edymion once did move
Night's goddess to come down,
And listen to his tale of love,
Aim not thou idly at the moon.
Be it thy pleasure and thy pride
That, wrecked on stretched desire,
Thou canst thy fiercest torments hide,
And silently expire."

"Friends all," she continued, gently laying aside the instrument, "the love of our two folk turns to tragedy. We shall see how a false villain—ay, a false, false villain—bred ill-feeling in the maid, and

THE MADNESS OF BETTY HOOTON. 17

how she, finding that all his tales were but slanderous lies, took her heart between her hands thus, and broke it clean asunder!"

Basil could bear the strain no longer; in spite of Anastasia's hindering grasp, he rose from the settee and went to the back of the theatre, whither she had again retired.

"Betty!" he faltered. "'Tis I, Betty—I, your Basil—Basil who hath always loved you!"

The beauty arched her white neck haughtily. "Sir," she said, "the Lady Elizabeth Hooton, at your command."

"Nay, Betty, my life, my love! See, here rests the miniature you gave to me" (he tore open his vest) "here against my heart! Each breath of mine hath stirred it, Betty, for more than forty years. No hour hath gone by without a dear thought being yours, my Betty—no dream came but with you in't. 'Tis I, Betty, your poor, lonely Basil."

For one brief moment her eyes were resplendent with the fire of wondering joy, then the veil fell once more.

"There is no Betty," she whispered, "no Betty

and no Basil. The wretched Betty lies buried under the deep grass in the greenwood—at the very spot where she sent away the lad she loved. . . . Good friends—the second act.”

Bubble Magic.

2

BUBBLE MAGIC.

THE last hind had left the booth. The Ambassador, the Page, and Clarinda were spreading supper on the trestled table behind the tattered stage-curtain. Yesternight had been a benefit, and we were now to eat the remnants of the feast. We had played Phillip Massinger's *Maid of Honour*, and though our acting was stirring enow, few of the country folk had ventured.

We sat at table in our players' clothes. I, the master, was Bertoldo; Mary Perceval, Camiola; Mrs. Brookwith, the Duchess of Siena. Robert, Ferdinand, and the rest were made up of recruits from Town. Stupid prattle came from the further end; but where we three sat there was nought but whispering. Camiola's nut-brown hair lay adown her back; my fingers stole amongst it, and made a nest; there was no expression in her colourless—

almost haggard—face, save that of passion. She would not taste the viands; but once, when I had drunk, and turned to speak with the Duchess, her hand stole to my beaker, and her lips pressed where mine had pressed.

Mrs. Brookwith's gorgeous colouring put me in mind of an old-fashioned garden. She was not without beauty; but 'twas the beauty of peonies and Turk's-caps. Moreover, her eyes were bright and sparkling as the toad's that lurks beneath such flowers; they hinted of vast knowledge acquired by a placid contemplation of the strange.

Our talk turned on love. Camiola said with a shudder that, though she had never suffered, such a thing must be horrible, must burn out the heart, must leave a woman nought but an empty shell. The Duchess laughed drily, and passing one plump, beringed hand behind my shoulder, stroked the girl's neck.

"Dear child," she said, "when you are old as I, and have passed so oft through the flame, you will know that 'tis not love, but falsity, that burns and destroys."

I interrupted her with: "I hold love to be nowise great as friendship; a friend who preserves a perfect faith is the best gift Providence bestows."

For I was thinking of Norreys, who even that day had written, for the hundredth time proffering help if my affairs were disordered. As children, we were bed-fellows, and, though he had heired a great estate, he had ever held me as his bosom friend. Twice already had he rescued me from poverty, calling me *Quixote*, and taking away all shame. I loved him more than a brother.

"Ah, you have never loved—by some rare chance you have escaped the fire," retorted the Duchess, drawing her hand from Camiola's neck and laying it on my breast. "This heart awaits its torture!" she added.

Camiola, sighing querulously, threw in: "Men cannot understand women."

Just then one drew aside the curtain that oped to the field, and showed us the bright hues of the setting sun. The chain of talk grew brighter and brighter as the ale and wine went round. Unobserved we stole from the table, and went through

the court of the *Green Man*. No sooner had we reached the herb-garden, that lies east of the archway, when the Duchess turned to me, somewhat abruptly.

"You have perchance not forgotten that Earl Russetwell carried me to Italy, and detained me there five years?" she said. . . . "In that time I gathered forbidden fruits. . . . I know much of love. Would you that I showed to yourself, Bertoldo, and to our sweet Maid of Honour here, some little trick of the near future?"

Camiola in haste assented for both, and Mrs. Brookwith hurried up the stone stairs to the gallery where lay the women's chambers, to return with a white silken case, which presently disclosed a tiny pipe of gold and a crystal phial half filled with rosy liquid.

"Let us remove to a more secret place," she said.

She led the way down the ill-kept alley of box to a lawn, where the yew fowls had lost all shape. In an arbour adorned with portraits of long-mouldered gamesters we sat, the waning afterglow hanging overhead.

" 'Tis nought but the blowing of bubbles in magic water," she explained. " You, Camiola, shall have the first sight. Observe me, and when the bubble attains its largest, peep into the picture."

Wherewith she poured into the hollowed palm of her left hand a shallow pool, and bedabbling the bowl, blew and blew until the bubble swelled to the size and form of a citron. She motioned with her head for Camiola to look, and the girl bent forward.

A cry of rapture leaped from her lips; a rich colour filled her cheeks. The bubble burst, but her inspired loveliness remained. She clasped her hands; she gazed upon me; I read new-born joy in her eyes. She would have spoken, but her heart beat far too quickly. She took up a flower I had culled in the garden, unfastened her laces, and let it fall to her bosom.

" What did she see? " I asked in jealous eagerness.

" Nay, that is not in my lore. I saw only floating colours. 'Tis your turn now."

Again she stirred the water with the bowl, and this time blew a bubble big as a child's head. At

her nod I stooped, and peered into the thing, and saw the garden, amethyst, scarlet, sapphire, yellow, crystal-green, blood-colour. And, as it were, the yew-birds fought.

But, within the moment, the garden disappeared, and in its place came a moor where curlews flew and a mountain river threshed into spume, and afterwards a squat thatched house with many dormers. The door of this opened, and Penthea herself—the one woman for whom my feeling resembled passion—stood on the threshold, and held out her arms towards me.

“Sure, ‘tis Penthea!” I cried unconsciously.

The bubble burst.

Mrs. Brookwith smiled. “Whatever you have seen—and I have small desire to know,” she said—“depend upon’t ‘tis true. If Madam Penthea were in the picture——”

“She stood as waiting to clip me!” I faltered. “Prythee show me another bubble that I may know more.”

“Not so, my friend—there’d be no virtue in’t. And I must return; you have forgotten that I’m to

design a new gown for mine honourable daughter, Margaret Overreach. Fare-thee-well”

She poured back the drops that lay in her palm, and dried the golden pipe ; then rose, and with the curtsey that she used so admirably in the plays, moved from the arbour. I followed, with many entreaties ; but she was implacable ; and at last I went to my chamber, and began to write a long letter to my mistress, telling her of the sweetest vision. Ere long, however, my eyes lifted and fell on a yellowed map that hung between mantel and window, and looking carefully upon it, to my amaze I found that Bleaklow was but fifteen miles distant. So I tore up the sheet, and having studied the way, without a word to any of my folk set out to visit her, though 'twas but a fortnight since we had parted, and our next meeting was to have been soon.

Mine hostess lent me a tinder-box and a horn lantern, declaring that I should need them in the woodland ; and then, having ascertained the road to the next village, I set off in haste. Darkness had already fallen ; one by one the stars blinked into

being. My repeater told me 'twas ten by the clock. The white line of the road kept me from straying, till I reached Hunter's Manor, where the hamlet lies at the entrance of Gardom Wood.

Most of the villagers were abed; but a decrepit gaffer, already half-stripped, had bethought himself that his toll-gate was not yet locked for the night. Of him I inquired the way to Bleaklow; but 'twas long ere his dimmed brain could take in my question, and at the first wave of his hand toward a bridle-path that struck directly to the heart of the forest, I hurried onward, and in the hollowed bole of the first great tree, struck a light and fired my lantern.

Gardom Wood was in its rarest beauty. Autumn had tinged the leaves all imaginable shades of red and brown and green; the cold air (methought it froze) was pregnant with the rich smell of withering leaves. Here and there as I went, reremice, that haply had never beheld a lantern before, beat down and rattled the horn; owls wailed out their melancholy; up in the branches were squirrels with glistening teeth, and in the damp vistas will-with-

the-wisp was jerking. The place was full of life; ripples of mirth came from the streams that prattled across the path; in one grove of half-withered cedars that was threatened by a falling gable, moans and sighs crept from the tips of the boughs.

Of a sudden one in pure white tripped from behind an undergrowth of young poplars, and a sweet breath touched my cheek. 'Twas Camiola, dressed as I had seen her last, and still adorned with courtly gew-gaws.

"I have waited for long," she said, with a shiver; "but now that you are come, it seems scarce a moment since we parted. I go with you—as your page—as your lantern-bearer."

I dissented. "The walk is far too long, child," I said. "Go back—take the lantern. You have no covering for your head. . . . I insist. . . ."

Feigning contrition, she stooped, but caught the iron ring of the lantern, and no sooner had she possession when she flew for some paces in front, nor would she permit me to lessen the space between us until I had vowed to use no more persuasion, but to permit her to have her will.

In truth she made a very dainty picture. . . .

We linked arms, she still swaying the lantern by her skirt, and so in silence passed through the forest of Gardom Wood, and reached an "edge" traversed by many a pack-horse track. There, as I pondered on the right way, Camiola spoke:

"'Tis this," she said, pointing to the least worn.
"Already I hear the water."

Listening, I, too, heard the sound of a hissing river, thrown into flood by storms in the upland. Yet was I bewildered by Camiola's knowledge.

"How comes it, mistress, that you know the way?" I asked.

"The bubble magic showed me, and I have the keener ears," she made answer. "Now, since I have replied frankly, tell me who is this madam we go to see?"

Her tone was somewhat contemptuous; I was affronted. "The woman I love—she, who is to be my wife."

Camiola's limber fingers twined about mine. "Poor soul, poor soul!" she sighed, whether for pity of Penthea or of me I knew not.

A flock of curlews flapped overhead, whistling and hissing, and Camiola shrank closer to my side. I had not divined that her nearness would enchant me so subtly. We reached a narrow clough that sloped to the river. There, as we crossed the flints, I heard her quench a moan, and, seeing that she walked lamely, asked if she were in pain.

"My feet," she said—above the noise of the river—"my feet were not shod for such a journey."

In the lantern-light she raised her left foot and showed me the once white satin stained with the green juices of the grass—and the sole flapping apart from the rest.

"You go no further," I said. "See, I will leave my coat to cover you, and the lantern also shall be yours. . . . I will send from the house. . . . Surely it cannot be very far."

Camiola laughed merrily, as if she prisoned some secret. "You will never send from her house to me," she replied. "I can walk—'twas but a pebble got underneath my heel. I will bind it with my bodice-lace—thus!" She drew out one of her silken

cords, and strapped it cross-wise about her instep.
“I am ready,” she said.

At the stepping-stones, I caught her to my heart, and with one arm of hers encircling my neck, and the other outstretched in front with the lantern, we crossed the perilous place.

On the further bank I struck my repeater again, and found that midnight was past by two hours. There was no path visible now, so perforce we made our way through the stunted beech-spinney. On the summit of a limestone hill, where grey ghostly things peeped from the thin sward, I saw the gables of Bleaklow, with a light burning in Penthea’s window.

Camiola grasped my arm convulsively, and then held the lantern so that I might see her face.

“Tell me,” she whispered fondly, “is mistress beautiful as I?”

My tongue was on the point of declaring rashly that Penthea was peerless, when it was borne upon me, with some uneasiness, that the loveliness of her with whom I travelled could not be excelled. For there was a wonderment of gay beauty in her face;

it seemed as a virgin's soul played there. Erstwhile I had deemed her coldly charming; now I wondered how she had come to preserve through so many trials that exquisite passion.

"Not more beautiful," I hesitated.

She lowered the lantern, and again we progressed until we came to the bed of rushes beside the long pool. There the herons were beginning to stir.

Camiola gazed, as in some fashion afraid, along the old road that runs from Silence village to Bleaklow. Near us lay a rock basin, where the water gushed down on pebbles and yellow sand.

"My feet are hot and tired—let me bathe them here," she said. "But for a minute. . . . I would fain see the lady. . . . A constant woman's heart—"

Sitting on the ground she undid her shoes and drew off her stockings. She dabbled her feet in the rillock, crying out in delight; and though I craved so keenly for sight of Penthea, in truth I felt no impatience now.

"Why not rest beside me, Bertoldo?" she said.

"Sure there's no harm in staying a while. I am very weary."

I sank to a tussock, setting the lantern betwixt us. She curved her neck so that the breeze might bring with it the lightest sound; ever and anon she looked toward the road. Once she paled, and smote her breast; but the moment afterward her colour returned, and she took off her kerchief, and dried her feet, and donned her stockings and shoes.

"I hold love to be nowise great as friendship," she said, repeating in a mocking voice my words of yestereven. "A friend who preserves a perfect faith is the best gift Providence bestows."

My hand moved to take the lantern; on my fingers fell a hasty shower of tears. Camiola wept, wherefore I could not understand.

"Dear child!"

She recovered herself soon. "Oh, that I had never come!" she murmured.

Before us in the gloom whinnied a mare that galloped eastward as to welcome the dayspring. Then the curtain lifted, and the sky flushed with all the hues I had seen in the bubble, and soon the

sun, gigantic and ruddy, lifted himself from the fork of a hill.

Morning came in strides ; from the thorn-bushes rose birds, piping autumnally. We stole along the depressions of the ground ; for I was anxious that Penthea might not behold me till I had reached the garden. The light in her window was extinguished—or was it that the blaze of the sun dazzled my eyes ?

At the gate of the wood-close I turned to Camiola.

“ Sweetheart,” I said, “ My mistress—’twould be best for me to see her first and explain your company. Stay here a while—I will return very soon.”

All rosy was she in the first light ; so rare, indeed, that I was loth to part.

“ Ay, leave me, dearest ! ” she cried, with tender cajolery. “ Leave me if thou canst ! ”

Even as she spoke, Penthea threw open her door and gazed eastward along the grass-grown road, and held out her arms, as to draw one bosomward.

I moved forward. Camiola caught my cloak with one hand, and with the other pointed to where Norreys approached, spurring his great white stallion.

The Shelter of Lathkill.

THE SHELTER OF LATHKILL.

I HAD scarce spent a week at the Bath, when my kinswoman, Mrs. Driden (who had introduced me to all the fine society there), was suddenly recalled to the North, to attend the bedside of her husband, who was sickening with small-pox. I begged permission to accompany her; for reply she drew me gently to the mirror in our parlour.

"Look on our likenesses," she said. "Could I ever forgive myself if I ruined your fairness—as mine was ruined long ago? Nay, my pretty; I've been through the scourge, and God forbid that I should put another girl in danger! I'm well aware that you cannot stay here without a duenna, so, if it please you, on my way home I'll drive through Derbyshire, and call briefly on Miss Hepzibah Rowland who, I make no doubt'll be vastly pleased to receive you."

"Miss Hepzibah!" I exclaimed. "Lord, the very name gives me vapours!"

Cousin Driden shook her head gravely. "You are young and giddy," she replied. "Miss Rowland may be old—antiquated perhaps—but there's no better—no kinder gentlewoman in the country. And since your dear father left you in my charge, enjoining me to use every care, 'tis my duty to see you in safe hands. Moreover, the lady's related to you on the mother's side, and you may be sure of a warm welcome."

Before she left the place, she gave me strict injunctions to make her adieux to the company she had frequented, and never to stir abroad after sunset.

"There are many adventurers here," she said, as she kissed me ere entering the carriage; "and as you're one of the best fortunes of the year, prythee beware. 'Twould break my heart in sober earnest if you were befooled by one of the gilded flies——"

"Dear coz," I interrupted, pertly, I confess; "were I a child of fourteen, instead of a woman well-nigh of age, there might be some fear! As

'tis, perhaps you'll give me the names of such as I'm to shun? There's Colonel Malory—Sir Charles Prestwich——"

"Fie upon you, child!" she cried, with some reasonable anger. "Colonel Malory—a grandsire, and as well-reputed a man as ever lived; Sir Charles (ay, Kit, you do well to colour!)—Sir Charles, a lad, who, in spite of his gaiety, has the kindest and truest heart you'll ever find—a hundred times too good to be spoiled by a silly madcap! There, I've brought water to your eyes; forgive me, dearest—Heaven knows, I'm troubled enough about my poor man!"

So we kissed again, and the carriage passed down the street; leaving me alone for the first time of my life in a strange place. After a downfall of tears, I went to my bedchamber and prepared to go a-visiting the dowagers of our acquaintance, for the delivery of explanations concerning the cause of my cousin's abrupt departure.

'Twas at the lodging of Mrs. Hallowes, the famous blue-stockting, that I first met Selina, Countess of Lathkill. *Evelina* had been published not more

than a few days, and yet everybody discussed the work vehemently. Good Mrs. Hallowes, whose volume of *Essays on the Female Understanding* was vastly popular at Court, condemned the romance as the offspring of some girl's foolish fancy; and her ladyship, entering at that moment, cried out sharply that Life was foolish enough without the lucubrations of inexperience, and that women were made for other duties than the flourishing of quills.

Mrs. Hallowes, nowise offended, presented me; afterwards adding, in a low voice not intended for my ears, that my father had left me sole heiress of a fine fortune. Lady Lathkill's manner changed from frigidity to genial warmth; soon she drew me apart from the gossips, and with much affable condescension, induced me to speak frankly of myself and my affairs.

"'Tis comforting to find a person of birth and breeding in such a flock of chatter-pynots," she said. "And, pray, young mistress, how d'you like the Bath? I judge from your charmingly fresh manner that you are little used to such frivolities as are in vogue here. The country—not the town—gave you

that dainty skin and those clear eyes. Lord! what a pretty shepherdess for Arcady!"

Her kindness enchanted me so much that I found myself speaking as familiarly as to a friend of some years' standing. I told her how that I had lived in great seclusion since my beloved father's death, and, that my mourning being done, Cousin Driden had very agreeably proffered to play chaperon at the Bath. She held up her exquisitely-shapen hands, the fingers ablaze with jewels, when she learned that I had never been to Town.

"Ah, child," she said, with a sigh, "you're more fortunate than I was! My folk dragged me there almost ere I could say my A B C—and in my thirteenth year I was made a toast at the Kit-cat Club!"

Then I began to realise that she had been, and still was a beauty of some note. Here, in a tranquil mood, she presented the picture of a high-bred widow, gowned in the richest and dullest of black silk. Her age, as far as I could guess, was certainly not more than forty; and her face—unlike the faces of the other women—was unmarred by

powder and rouge, and quite free from wrinkles. And yet, in some wise that I cannot understand, she set me a-thinking of a magnificent bird of prey. Maybe 'twas because of the prominent nose, and the black eyes that suggested a covering of velvet over polished steel.

She did not rise to take leave until she had learned all the story of my kinswoman's departure, and of my intention to visit Miss Hepzibah Rowland; a lady whom she knew, and professed to esteem, although she declared that beneath her roof I should die of deadly dulness.

As I stood by the window to watch her enter her chair, a chorus of vituperation arose from the other ladies. The eccentricity of Lady Lathkill was not of a kind to appeal to these silly creatures who flocked about the shrine of the Queen of Essayists. I heard the departed visitor described as mad—as a bold gamester—as a wretch who had an inordinate belief in her own importance. In short, the abuse became so pronounced, that the bland Hallowes felt it her duty to solicit charity.

“The Countess is more to be pitied than blamed,”

she said. "Doubtless a woman of freaks, and careless of the result of any escapade; but there's some merit in a mother who strives as she does to find a fitting bride for her son! She hath grown desperate, poor soul, for none of our beauties'll wed a natural of her own accord. An extraordinary handsome fellow, 'tis true; but, alas! his wits . . ."

She only added fuel to the flame; in those days I was too hot-tempered to endure what followed without protest of some kind. I came from my window, made a mocking curtsey, and withdrew without a word.

On the following morning, as I drank the waters, Lady Lathkill again approached me, and carried me to breakfast at her rooms. There she exercised such a fascination that I verily believe that I told her the amount of my fortune, and enumerated the offers of marriage that I had already refused.

Her ladyship commented on my wisdom. "You're wise, dear girl," she said. "Wait but a while and the best'll be at your feet. But methinks such a belle deserves a good title—one of the very foremost—and a fine husband, to boot."

As I walked homeward, with my landlady's daughter in attendance, it fell about that I met Charles Prestwich. I dismissed the woman, and went with him to the China shop, where we spent a merry hour cheapening monsters in bronze and ivory. When I told him that I was about to leave the Bath, I was nowise displeased to see his face fill with dismay.

"I go to bide with my three-times-removed aunt, Miss Hepzibah Rowland," I said.

A squatting dragon fell from between his fingers. "By all the powers!" he cried, "she's my own aunt six-times-removed, and moreover I look upon Rowland as a home! I'd give the world to play escort for your journey!"

Of course I played the prude, and told him that 'twas altogether impossible; nevertheless, when he left me at the door of my lodging, I had agreed that he should ride beside my coach for the first sixty miles—the country being infested with highwaymen at that time. Such terrible misadventures did the rogue picture, that I accepted his offer with heart-felt gratitude.

On the afternoon of the morrow, one brought a letter from Lady Lathkill, saying that she herself was travelling north, and would be glad of my company. I marvelled somewhat at an invitation after so brief an acquaintance, but offered my regrets because I was obliged to decline, since Mrs. Driden was sending back the coach, in which I was to proceed in the care of her servants. An hour after I had written, the lady appeared in person, to beg me, instead of going direct to Rowland, to break my journey for a few days at her house of Lathkill Ferrers.

Against my will, I was compelled to decline the honour; and her ladyship withdrew, professing herself keenly disappointed, and hoping that at some time in the near future I might be her guest. Scarcely had she left the house, when Mrs. Hallowes, accompanied by two spinsters of mature age, arrived, and began, in spite of my protests, to warn me against accepting any favours from the countess's hands.

"'Tis a thankless task," said the genius, "a thankless task to attempt interference with the affairs of

one so young and headstrong. But my sincere regard for Mistress Driden compels me to lay certain matters before you. Believe me, Miss Barnard, after your reprehensible behaviour at my house, I was half-minded not to speak."

"Noble creature!" cried her companions. "Mirror of her sex!"

"The town's well aware that Lady Lathkill's marked you for her prey," continued Mrs. Hallowes, "and mind you, miss, you're not the first, though I don't doubt you're the simplest! If she were unsuccessful with t'others, 'tis like as not she'll manage you——"

"Prythee," said I, like a saucy wench, "her ladyship's not a gallant—or a vulture!"

"No," replied Mrs. Hallowes, "she's nought but a distracted mother, burdened with debt, who's forced to wed her lunatic to a fortune, or else to face ruin."

Thereat, and I am ashamed to tell it, I was rude enough to go to the harpsichord, and sing, as if none was present, the modish ballad called *The London Lass's Lamentation*:

“Alas ! I am in a rage,
And bitterly weep and cry ;
Because I’m nineteen years of age,
Yet cannot be married, not I !”

The ladies endured this for some time in mute anger; then, shaking their heads, left me to reflect that I had made a fool of myself. And when my petulancy had passed, I'll own that I wept a little and wished that I'd never seen any of these croaking folk, or, for that matter, the matchmaking mother herself.

I was glad when, two days afterwards, there came a letter from Miss Hepzibah—the quaintest, most singular letter imaginable, in which I was assured that nought in the world could give her greater pleasure than to entertain my mother's daughter under her roof-tree. She wrote of country delights, of the making of fragrant essences from flowers, and of long happy hours spent at the embroidery frame. I was informed that her favourite reading was “The Whole Duty of Man”; but that she occasionally devoted an afternoon to “Meditations Amongst the Tombs.” The dear creature had,

moreover, copied for me, at full length, Pope's "Vital Spark." Yet I'm bound to say that her letter touched me oddly—being so full of earnestness and kindly feeling. I determined forthwith to behave in a more decorous fashion than I had exhibited of late.

On the morrow, the coach being come, I set out for my journey northward, with Charles Prestwich riding alongside on a fine bay gelding of his own rearing. When he was not looking at me (and that was seldom enough), I stole long glances, and finally settled in my mind that if I lived to a hundred years, I should never meet a comelier or better-bred man. I'll not tell what he said and what I said as the day passed; but somehow, when parting time came, I felt my heart beat very quick; and after our farewell the hostelry where I spent the night seemed as dreary as a forsaken swallow's-nest.

I tossed restless in a great bedstead till daybreak, and rose very indisposed for further travel; but as 'twas arranged that I should reach Rowland ere midnight, I started when the church-clock of the little market-town struck eight. Heavy rain was falling; the roads were deep in mud; and Plockett, Mrs.

Driden's coachman—a corpulent and hot-tempered gaffer, withal the most trustworthy soul in existence—lashed the post-horses with tremendous vigour, and made them gallop so fiercely that ere long the windows were all curtained with splashes.

I remember very little of the day, for sleep came soon, and I dozed quietly in a corner; only stirring when the horses were changed, or when we rested for half-an-hour's refreshment at post-houses. Indeed, it seems to me now that I was never thoroughly awake until sunset came—a stormy sunset, crimson as blood. The rain had ceased; a strong wind was raging, and when I lowered a panel to look out upon the country, I saw trees on either side bowing almost to the ground. Soon Plockett descended from his box to light the lamps, and told me that we were already within the county of Derbyshire, and that the woodland about was known as Combermere Forest.

In the very midst of this gloomy place we were passed by another coach, which travelled at a far greater speed than ours. 'Twas a state equipage, all green and gold; the horses, black as coal, were

flecked with lather; a young coachman apparently had much ado to hold them in. And in a short while we stopped short of a sudden, and Plockett came with a rueful face to the door.

“There’s been a mishap,” he said; “the coach that went afore us is left stranded by the wayside, and the horses are Lord knows where!”

I alighted at once; he went before me with one of the lamps, and I perceived a lady standing in the middle of the road, wringing her hands, whilst her waiting-woman ran to and fro and made the welkin ring with high-pitched shrieks. As I began to offer such assistance as my men could give, the lady threw back her travelling hood, and, with an exclamation of delight and relief, seized both my hands and kissed me on either cheek.

“Of all the wonders!” she cried. “Here am I, cast away—wrecked but five miles from home, and Heaven sends the one whom of all others I most wished to see!”

There was nought for me to do save to place Mrs. Driden’s coach at Lady Lathkill’s disposal, and to beg permission to convey her to her house. When

she had entered, Plockett twitched my sleeve viciously and drew me aside.

"If we do this, madam," he muttered, "there'll be no Rowland to-night! The horses are spent, and the road afront us is the worst in the land. And I can scarce understand how the traces of her la'ship's horses are cut clean asunder, as with a knife!"

I resented his objections, and sternly bade him act under the instructions of Lady Lathkill's man. He mounted, still grumbling, to his box, and soon we left the high road and entered a grassy glade. The countess was vastly grateful; as I sat beside her she put an arm around my waist, and called me the prettiest names conceivable.

"'Tis wondrous strange," she said, "that fate after all compels you, by your own generous act, to accept the shelter of Lathkill! Sure there's something out of the natural in our meeting. La! I'm almost glad of the accident, since it gives me the pleasure of your company! Have no fear, Miss Barnard, concerning the good Rowland—as soon as we go indoors I'll send a messenger—or your man can have fresh horses and drive onward——"

"And I with him," I said, "'twill not be more than an hour out of our way."

"Tush!" she said. "You'll not spoil a courtesy by refusing to bide with me for the night. To hear you talk, child, I might be dragging you into a den of lions! And you're so tired—so wan—dear heart; you're more fit for bed than for such a jolting uphill and downhill as lies between here and your destination."

So she talked and talked, with scarce a word from me, until the coach drew up at the portico of a great house, with scarce one window lighted. A bell clanged dismally; the door was opened by a withered butler, who held a candle in his hand, and Lady Lathkill conducted me across the threshold.

"Welcome to Lathkill Ferrers," she said. "Believe me, dear one, your presence delights me more than I can say. You shall have the chamber in which good King Charles slept—when he journeyed north to Bolsover Castle—and we'll sup together in state."

Thereupon she gave orders for my trunks to be brought indoors, and led me to a fine vaulted

chamber, hung with ancient tapestry which quivered to every gust of wind. After summoning a woman to attend to my wants, she left me, with a promise to return within the hour, and to see that some messenger was despatched at once to Rowland, with word that on the morrow I would continue my journey.

The waiting-woman was dull-witted and awkward—a ghastly, pale-faced wench, whose hands were all rough with kitchen work. Her ministrations were not to my liking; very soon I bade her desist and leave me to dress unaided. I chose a gown of white satin, the skirt quilted over the great hoop that was then in vogue, and clasped about my neck the collar of table diamonds which had been my dear father's last gift. When Lady Lathkill returned, magnificent in purple velvet, she cried out with admiration.

"To think of such beauty being caught by some commoner! Why, my sweet Miss Barnard, that brow of yours was made for a coronet—'twould be a rank offence against Providence were it not so adorned!"

And arm in arm we passed along the galleries till

we came to a balustrade in the wall, which overlooked a chamber on a lower floor. This place was ablaze with candlelight ; I heard voices there raised in odd wrangling. Her ladyship drew me forward—there was tumultuous pride in her manner—I could distinguish the beating of her heart.

A table was spread in the midst ; two men walked round and round. One was a chaplain, middle-aged, and ugly beyond description, with the sleekest curls of red hair, and a nose purple as a mulberry. And t'other was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. But yesterday I had believed that Prestwich was more handsome than any other man in the world ; yet here I saw one whose face and figure were absolute perfection—a lad with ivory skin and black hair and strange eyes, wherein glowed a dull red fire.

“My son,” said the Countess, in a low voice—“my one child—my darling !”

Once more she drew my arm within her own, and we descended the staircase and entered the dining-parlour. Lord Lathkill started—fell back—then advanced with the most graceful of bows.

" 'Tis like a fairy story," he said. " Sure, mistress, you're the sleeping beauty awakened! Ay, me, if I had been the lover with the kiss!"

And whilst he sighed very plaintively, his mother made haste to present to me Master Jonathan Bland, the gentleman who attended to the souls of her household. I hated the fellow; in truth I had much ado to submit to his lifting of my hand to his lips. He made a learned speech, in which I heard allusions to Danæe and the golden shower. Her ladyship's forehead puckered—he stopped short in the midst of a flowery sentence.

At table I drank French wine which, said my hostess, had lain in the cellars for more than a hundred years 'Twas bitter-sweet of taste; the very first draught mounted to my head, and made me talk giddily as a young, romantic chit just freed from the tutelage of her governess. Lord Lathkill refreshed himself with ale, thick as syrup and coloured like the wine of Oporto. His mother kept her gaze fixed upon him; whenever by any chance she looked away, he spoke vaguely and incoherently of things beyond my knowledge.

" You'll scarce believe," he whispered at last, " how this ale comes to be so dark. Yet there's no reason why I should not tell—'tis because at the brewing, to every gallon of spring water is put a quart of bullock's blood—piping hot! There's nought like it for bringing wit to a man! Lord! you should see poor me sometimes—as mute as a—I know not what. . . . How beautiful you are mistress, nay—I never saw such beauty. . . ."

His cheeks had grown rosy; the fire of his eyes grew brighter and brighter; his lips came dangerously near to mine.

" Why, my lord," I cried foolishly; "you have scarce known me an hour, and yet you flatter!"

I chanced to look at Lady Lathkill; her own colour had risen; methought there was something akin to shame in her face. She leaned forward (the butler being engaged at the sideboard), and refilled my glass.

" The wine is milk-mild," she said. " You might drink a score glasses and yet feel no inconvenience. Heigho! I know not when I enjoyed a meal so well! My son in high feather, and one who'll be

the reigning toast in a few months a-sitting at my table!"

This second glass increased my light-headedness to such a degree that when the young man bent suddenly forward and kissed me on the mouth, I could only laugh and strike his face gently with my hand. And then he caught my fingers and pressed them above his heart.

"Let's play at love," he said. "Let's play at true courting. You to be the countrymaid, I the swain."

He rose of a sudden, and lifting his silver tankard above his head, flung it with all his might at the butler, who only saved himself from a broken skull by slipping aside and scurrying to his place behind madam's chair. And in my mad folly, I laughed and laughed until pain in my sides hindered me; and my lord, taking my mirth for praise, grew warmer and warmer in his love-making.

Lady Lathkill interposed with apt remarks upon the conjugal state. "There's nought better in the world," she observed, "than to know a true soul in whom one can repose all one's confidences. I my-

self was wedded young and wedded happily. A thousand times better to wed young—there's no such breaking-in of tempers as follows when thirty's reached, and wine's turned to vinegar!"

Her son took my hand again, and squeezed it between his palms. "Dear one," said he, "this play of wooing's the prettiest thing I ever knew! What wouldst thou say if we went through with it—if good Jonathan entered our comedy and made us man and wife?"

I glanced at Lady Lathkill; her face was averted; her shoulders were drawn up high. When her son divined that her gaze was no longer upon him, his voice changed curiously, and a look of utter vacancy came into his face.

"La-la-la!" he sang. "La-la-la!"

She turned sharply, haggard as death itself. "My boy," she cried, "remember—remember!"

Once more he became the fantastical, charming gallant. "Ay, sweetheart, let's play to the end," he said. "'Twill be a strange play, a dainty play. I'm courting you, and you're to be my countess—mistress of my house and lands, and mother of my heir.

Egad! how my kinsman of Holderness'll curse when he knows that I've gotten a wife!"

My glass was filled again ; a burning thirst parched tongue and lips. 'Twas only afterwards that I knew some brain-weakening drug had been mixed with the wine. And the man was wonderful to look upon —his face the face of a pleading angel.

"Since 'tis your desire, my lord," I said, "I can't gainsay it. I'll play."

Then Lady Lathkill rose and whispered something in the chaplain's ear, and he left the room for a short while. The mother's face was wreathed with smiles ; she drew her chair nearer and fondled me, calling me her daughter-to-be, and protesting that no Countess of Lathkill had ever a tenth part of my loveliness. Her son was the phoenix amongst men, she declared—never had woman brought forth a more beautiful child.

Jonathan Bland returned, attired in the black gown of his order ; he crooked his arm for my lady to take.

"Come, children," she said gaily ; "we'll to the chapel and finish our comedy. The house-folk are

in waiting there—'twould be hard to deny 'em a scene so full of delight."

I rose then, and, although my head was spinning, walked steadily by the side of my mock-lover to a dusty chamber with a gilded altar and many oaken benches, whereon sat rough, eager-visaged men and women. No candles burned there; the grey light of dawn came through the painted windows.

I remember that I laughed once more, to see fat old Plockett, his face grown long as a fiddle, standing beside the brown pulpit.

And there we went through the form of marriage; and after the ring was placed upon my finger, we returned to the dining-parlour. Lord Lathkill began to sing again; this time his wearied mother did not attempt to restrain him. . . . I fell asleep in my chair, the morning sunlight blazing upon the disordered table.

* * * *

The air was hot with noontide when I was awakened by the sound of a door opening. I looked around vaguely—Lord Lathkill still sat beside me; his arm encircled my neck; the chaplain was gone,

and Lady Lathkill was ushering two folk into the room. One was Charles Prestwich; t'other a little old gentlewoman, with the most troubled countenance I had ever seen.

"A delectable sight!" cried my lady in a triumphant voice. "If you cannot believe my word, or the word of my servants, here's evidence for you."

Prestwich's face was full of bitterness and anger. "I rode on to Rowland," he said, "fearing lest some mishap might befall one whom I love. Here's our good kinswoman come to protect you; for, by God! Miss Barnard, you need protection!"

Lord Lathkill stirred sleepily, and opened blood-shot eyes. "La-la-la-la!" he muttered; then he kissed me again and again upon the lips, and I was too bewildered to thrust him away.

"Miss Barnard no longer," said my lady. "My daughter, the Countess——"

She waved her hand very haughtily, and they retired without another word.

Ignis-Fatuus.

IGNIS-FATUUS.

SITTING alone in the *Flying Childers* parlour of the "Snake," in Hucklow Dale, I was suddenly and most profoundly discomfited by the noise of the wind. At first it seemed as if some fair-ground were near by, for I heard the wailing of pandean-pipes and the thudding of worn-out drums. This brought a picture of a pale boy dancing on the outer platform of a marionette booth. Then the music changed, and I saw a lich-gate where the same boy, no longer clad in tinsel and gaudy calico, but ragged and bruised, crouched and listened, between fits of whimpering, to sonorous organ chords.

I could endure the torture no longer. The knowledge that my hostel stood in so remote a valley fretted me until my soul was wholly unquiet. I caught the hare's-foot that hung at the end of the bell-rope, and pulled it until the wire that ran be-

neath the cornice creaked and chattered as if it would snap asunder.

The landlady came at once. She was a restless old woman, given to abstraction, and endowed with a purity of accent that was rare amongst Peak-folk. She had confided to me that the "Snake" was her heritage, and that she had never left it for a day since her marriage forty years ago. A long, rigid grey stocking, pierced with bright needles, swung from her hands.

" You rang, sir? " she said, curtseying.

The organ music had ceased ; instead I heard the tramping of horses in a glade.

" Does the wind often scream in this fashion ? " I asked hurriedly.

She looked at me in amazement for some moments ; then she turned her head from side to side.

" I hear nothing, there is no wind. It is so quiet outside, that when I went to the shippion to see that the beasts were well foddered, I could hear the crickets chirping on the house hearth ! "

I rose and stood trembling at her side. " You must be wrong. Listen—go near the door ! "

She obeyed, but still heard no sound. "It is certainly calm," she said. "I will open the door if you wish, so that you may see for yourself. If the candles sweat I shall be surprised."

And she drew back the bolts and pulled the door forward. The candles burned upright as ever. I passed to the threshold and looked on the night. The garden was full of snow; even the straggling boughs of the holms were so overweighted that their trunks bent arch-wise. There were no home lights in the valley; no inhabited house stood within six miles. On the further side of the road that bounded the forecourt, the frozen river glistened like a living snake.

The sound ceased, then began again with a keener suggestiveness. I heard the voice of the man I had saved—the man who had wronged me. He was calling my name. My flesh chilled and the hair of my head arose.

"I can stay here no longer," I said; "I must go on to Hucklow."

The old woman laid her hand on my arm. "You cannot go; the drifts were scarce passable even in full daylight."

She drew me to the hearth. "I will have a vehicle made ready early in the morning," she continued soothingly; "but to-night you must not leave this house."

Just then I heard in the wind the moans of the woman I had loved. For a while I dared to delight in the sound; but the whining of a newborn child arose, and my anguish became altogether maddening.

"Death in the snow is preferable!" I shrieked; "I will leave this accursed place!"

I tore myself away, and leaped into the shadows of the garden. On the road I paused and looked back, to see the hostess standing in the doorway, holding a candle at arm's length. Her head was bent; from the motion of her lips I divined that she was praying vehemently. A moon, cloaked in yellow mist, swam about the "edge"; on the western horizon lay two great stars, towards which a vast cloud-curtain advanced.

At intervals rabbits crossed the road over well-padded tracks. Grotesque drifts lay breast-high at even distances; the rough copings of the limestone

walls alone showed above the surface. I fought my way onward with an energy inspired by terror. The lighted windows of the inn were soon blotted out of sight, and the shroud of the moon darkened and darkened until there was no sign of her presence.

When I reached the moorland, the noises softened to a whisper and then were silent. The night was bitterly cold; my clothes were frozen, and my hands, wet with battling with the drifts, steamed and burned as if scalded. With the disappearance of the moon a light snow began to fall, and another wind, voiceless but angry, arose. Before I had crossed another mile of road, I was surrounded by an eddy of particles, sharp as needles, that beat mercilessly upon my uncovered head and neck.

I struck a brimstone match, that blazed for one instant betwixt my hollowed palms, and found myself at the end of a narrow bridge, where a stream that rose in the uplands crept stealthily down a deep clough to the river. The bridge was of monstrous shape; the snow in the middle rose like the spire of a village church.

There, for the first time, the madness of my freak

in leaving the inn became apparent to me, and, forgetful of the cruel music, I endeavoured to return. But the snow fell ever thicker and thicker, and it was no longer possible even to distinguish the walls. I had often deemed that I could die easily ; but now, when death seemed so imminent, all the comforts of my life (in truth a broken life) came back in tempting succession. I grew hopeful of the work whose accomplishment I had renounced two years before ; I pictured myself surrounded by the praises of the world ; I thrust rudely away the grievous recollections of destroyed passion and friendship ; and in place of tangible darkness saw a country warmed by soft breezes and fragrant with undreamed-of flowers.

The place where I stood was almost bare ; I felt the sharp stones under my feet. I determined to rest for a brief space, and sat at the foot of a drift, drawing my coat together and tying a handkerchief about my head. The moon half-cleared herself ; and, gazing upward to the "edge," behind which she was disappearing, I saw a flickering light move slowly towards the summit. It was surely borne by

some belated shepherd, who sought his hut. I rose hastily, and, striking another light, looked for some path by which I might reach him, and found near by a raised bridle-track, so wind-swept that not even the falling snow could lie there, descending to the bank of the river.

Six huge boulders rose above the ice. I crossed, and found myself at the foot of a hollow, screened from the storm by a thick tangle of leafless hawthorn. The light was no longer visible ; but I climbed until I was fain to stop and lean panting against the bank. When I started again, I turned a sharp corner and saw its gleam rising higher.

I cried aloud ; but my voice was dulled, and the light passed on and on. That part of the hillside I had reached was hedgeless ; in front lay a bed of snow whose surface had been broken by no human foot. Into this bed I fell prostrate, and crawled until I had reached the further side. The light had disappeared once more—evidently its bearer had reached the brow. I stumbled on, my heart beating cruelly, and in another quarter-hour reached a ruined gate-house, beneath whose arch I found footprints.

Again I cried; but no response came, and I hurried forward over the rapidly-filling tracks.

After abruptly turning past the broken buttress of a high wall, I saw the light for the third time. It was only at some few paces distance—an old lantern of greenish bubbled glass, that cast reflections upon a level of snow, which I knew must be one of the long meres which abound in Peakland. I could distinguish no bearer—was it possible that the glimmer was the foolish fire that leads hill-country folk to their doom?

“Help!” I cried. “I am lost!”

The lantern ceased to move, and I drew nearer. Then it was raised slowly, past the breast of a fur cloak, to a long white face.

I receded, and covered my eyes with my hand, for the bearer was the man who had been my friend. He had seen me; there was a burst of utter joy in his voice.”

“Heyricke!”

I turned and fled; but he followed in close pursuit. We passed into a grove of dwarf firs, one of which, lately uprooted by the wind, struck my breast

so that I fell and lost consciousness. When I recovered, he was sitting beside me, and my head lay on his knees.

"For the love of God, forgive me!" he cried. "I wronged you, but I have suffered."

I strove to rise, but his hands held my shoulders. I shook my head. I had lost all desire for his death, but my hatred still burned furiously.

"Since I stole her from you we have known no happy moment. Our sin lies betwixt us and joy!"

I laughed loudly; the wine of delight gushed through my veins. But such was my abhorrence that I would not honour him with speech.

His fingers moved to my forehead, and drew back my frozen hair.

"Forgive me, Heyricke," he begged, feverishly; "I have not forgotten all you did for me—I have not forgotten how your friendship lifted me from the gulf of death! Her passion—our passion—an *ignis fatuus!* Even before possession all desire died!"

It was sweet to hear this—sweeter than anything I had ever known—sweeter than the woman's love.

"I would give up all . . . I would even give up *her* if you would bless me once more with your friendship. And she is a prize worthy even of you. . . . And, spite of everything, I love her."

He lowered his head; I felt his warm breath on my cheek.

"Speak to me, Heyricke," he murmured. "'Twas the thought of you, hundreds of miles away as I believed, that brought me abroad to-night. I should have stayed at home; for to-night is the night of her trouble. But I could not endure the house. I have sinned, and my guilt lies heavily upon me."

I lay without a movement. He drew a flask from his pocket, and strove to force brandy between my teeth; but I closed my lips, and the burning spirit spread over chin and throat.

"Tell me what I must do to earn your pardon. Even if it be the laying-down of my life, it shall be as you bid."

I laughed again, and then, as he no longer held me, I rose to my feet. His voice grew in agony.

"But it is most for her sake that I entreat. It is not desire of the flesh that binds us together—

it is the union born of sorrow and shame. She has been ailing long—to-night, oh my God! they say that she may die! Our sin has wrapped about her like a burying-cloth—she cannot breathe! All her laughter is gone—Heyricke, you remember how she laughed?—it waned day by day. Nought can restore it but your forgiveness."

The wind in the planting blew out the lantern, and we were in darkness. I moved away and groped amongst the slender trunks, neither knowing nor caring if he followed. Soon I reached a terrace that ran, like the rampart of a ruined castle, above the marsh. There the storm was so violent that I was compelled to crouch beneath the low wall.

Suddenly I heard him approach. I lay still, hoping that he might not find me; but a gust forced him against my side.

"The threads of our life are interwoven with yours," he said; "yours are the stronger, and we are shrunken almost to nothingness. Ay, interwoven——"

And he fell on his knees and caught my hands. Once more I drew away.

"Exile would be no pain for her if you forgave ;
if you forgave—happiness——"

I know not how it came about ; but as I hastened onward, much of my bitterness died, and in its place came a desire to hear him speak again. I paused ; but I no longer heard him follow. My obduracy had crushed his soul.

Soon afterwards I reached the entrance of an ancient garden, formal and quaint. At the end lay a house with rounded gables ; all its windows were ablaze with light. As I approached, a door flew open, and an aged woman looked out. At sight of me she chuckled mirthfully.

"'Tis over, sir," she said. "A lass-child. My mistress is asking for you."

I entered the hall, and the nurse hastened to an upper chamber ; I shook the snow from my clothes, and went slowly up the bare staircase. A hot, spiced air met me in the gallery ; I heard a cracked voice cooing softly.

There was a bed standing on a raised platform in the middle of the chamber. From behind the hangings of faded amber brocade I heard the whis-

pering of the woman who had been my wife. It was full of a curious thrill.

"He has come. The moment he entered the house I knew."

The nurse replied: "Ay, the master's come."

A thin, white arm drew the curtain aside and beckoned to me.

"I felt that you were near," she sighed. "In the keen pang of my travail that alone supported me."

I went nearer, bent over the bed. Her arm encircled my neck. She began to sob and laugh.

"I always loved you . . . but I was a fool. Now, unworthy as I am of you, I can give myself freely to him. . . . He needs me . . . Do you forgive?"

No words came from my convulsed tongue.

"Nurse, bring my little one."

Her right arm still held me; with the left she clasped the child. She drew my head to the pillow.

"As soon as I was conscious of aught but pain," she said, "I looked into her eyes. They are like yours—of no other colour in the world. You have

always been in my mind. . . . She is more yours than his. . . . Do you forgive?"

Her face approached mine, and she kissed me again and again.

"I forgive all," I said hoarsely.

Then I went from the chamber to a dining-parlour. Gazing from the window I saw that the storm had passed. In the far-away village the lamps were lit to guide travellers across the moor.

A noise near the door startled me. Alston had returned. His face showed the joy of a spaniel whipped and taken into favour again.

"You have come to us!"

"I have come," I replied, "and now"—holding out my hand—"good-bye."

And, notwithstanding all his pleadings, I left the house and struggled through the snow towards the cheerful glow of Hucklow.



In the Devil's Cave.

IN THE DEVIL'S CAVE.

THE Lodge of George, Earl of Shrewsbury, was one of the finest buildings in the country. It stood on the summit of a steep hill, overlooking the little town of cutlers, with its Norman castle and tall-spired church. All around lay a great park, full of noble oaks; westward the view showed a fertile valley that wound gracefully to the wild moors of the Peak. To the Scots Queen the place, scarce yet discoloured with age, already teemed with melancholy traditions; she never traversed the Long Gallery at nightfall without conjuring visions of Henry's great Cardinal on his way to death at Leicester. A morbid fascination sometimes compelled her to bid the oldest of Lord Shrewsbury's servants recite the story of how the ailing priest sat on an oaken chest with his staff and beads in his hands, or walked to and fro, leaning upon the arm

of his gentleman-usher, George Cavendish, brother-in-law to my lord's mistress and wife, Bess of Hardwick.

The Cardinal had escaped violence, death following upon a broken heart; the Queen was to travel further south—as he had done—but to kneel before the block at Fotheringhay.

On the day of the last journey to Buxton, the gaffer's description of the scarlet-robed figure, sighing and moaning for a lost favour, brought to the lady an unaccustomed ironical mirth; although her breath quickened, her lips were twisted with laughter.

"A tailor's son and a puppet," she muttered. "But my good sister dare not lay a hand upon my life. France—Spain—the world would rise against her! A Dowager and a Queen——"

Then the jewelled hand, with the long taper fingers, waved the man aside. He shambled away mumbling; she turned to the window that looked Peakward; she strove to read the thoughts of one who dwelt a score miles away, in a grange amongst the hills. And as she gazed, she sighed and played with her golden crucifix.

"A comely lad," she said. "Clean of life, passionate, tender. Poor, poor Tony! One who might have been my son—and were I not a Queen might have been my true-love. Poor Tony!"

The Countess of Shrewsbury entered with shrill laughter; she carried her head haughtily, as if she viewed one of inferior position. Of late the ladies had not agreed well, and Bess of Hardwick had refused to sit at the tapestry frame with the royal captive and her women, although the needlework had all been offered to her for the new house that was to overlook the Vale of Scarsdale. A shrewd, cunning dame, with crinkled, yellow hair, sherry-coloured eyes, sly and glancing, a thick crimson upper lip, a peach-downy, oval chin. Like the Queen she wore black; her gown was of dull quilted cloth; Mary's of rich velvet, presented years ago by her uncle, the Cardinal of Lorraine.

"I bid you good-day, mistress," said the Countess. "Your lord hath sent word that the horses are ready for the journey to Buxton."

Then, curtseying satirically, so low that the rings of her hoop clicked, she backed to the door. No

sooner had she disappeared, when a curtain stirred, and Naue, the Queen's secretary, entered. She was wont to say that he ever brought with him a breeze from *la belle France*, for never was living man more full of mirth and vivacity. As he approached, he flourished his plumed hat jubilantly, in a fashion understood by none save himself and his lady.

He spoke from behind a lifted hand. "All's settled, madame," he said, using the French tongue. "The escort's ready—my lord the Earl says farewell to his spouse."

The Queen's eyes were sparkling with excitement. "Then there is no change," she whispered—"we go beside the river to the great cave, and then—then perhaps over the hill to the Bath? The fox sleeps—or he'd ne'er have let me choose the way!"

Mistress Seaton, the Queen's favourite chamberwoman, entered with an ermine riding-cloak, and a pouch of gold network to hang from the girdle. When the strings and buckles were fastened, the Queen leaned heavily upon Mistress Seaton's arm, and emphasising, as she ever did before Lord

Shrewsbury's household, the infirmity caused by her rheumatism, she feebly descended the staircase, halting often to feign lack of breath.

In the courtyard, however, the feigned trouble became real; the west wind, coming from the distant full-flowered heather, exhilarated her for the moment so that she forgot her weakness, and without pausing for aid, strove to reach the saddle as gaily as a young girl. The mare shied; the Queen fell heavily against the balustrade of the staircase, and her eyelids closed for a while. Lady Shrewsbury busied herself with the administering of cordials; she spoke of moving the Queen back to her chamber; but the languorous eyes opened at the words.

"To Buxton," she said. "I—am not hurt—not I. Were this the hardest blow I'd e'er felt, I'd be a happy woman!"

Then she smiled graciously upon the Countess, and rising, kissed her on the cheek. "Dear lady," she said, "you are too good—too kind to your luckless guest."

This time the Earl helped her to the saddle, and the gates were thrown open, and the cavalcade passed

to the park. Bess of Hardwick watched from the outer terrace, a herchief in readiness to wave; but neither the Earl nor his charge turned in the saddle for a parting look. Armed men rode in front and rear; on the Queen's right was the Earl, a weather-beaten man, sharp-featured and sandy; on her left rode Secretary Naue, jubilant at the sight of the faint colour that rose to his mistress's face, and watching from eyes secretly furtive the vibration of her nostrils. Behind were the ladies and gentlemen of the Scots suite, chatting freely and endeavouring to hide anxiety under a semblance of mirth.

The Queen's humour lightened; she jested with Shrewsbury (although he frowned very sourly), concerning the popular stories of Elizabeth's amours. In kindlier hours, the Countess had retailed the Court gossip as they sat together plying their needles, and Mary, after their last and most bitter quarrel had written a long letter that betrayed these confidences to the Sovereign.

When the party reached the bridle-path that crossed the moorland known as Totley Moss, the

Queen was so elated that she threw prudence to the winds. She began to smile and cast plaintive glances upon the Earl; and now that they were some miles away from his vigilant wife, his sternness relaxed, and he forgot to keep his forehead puckered with ugly wrinkles. To-day she was very fair to behold; her skin was more exquisitely white than ever; the new riding-hood had fallen aback, and the head-dress of pearls and auburn hair gleamed wonderfully in the hot sunlight.

"Dear Reynard," she said, using a byname which, the Countess having once overheard, had bred bitter trouble in the household, "what would my good sister do if the goose slipped from your jaws?"

The Earl smiled slowly. "Why, madam," he replied, "my head would fall from betwixt my shoulders. Since such is the case, 'tis surely wise in me to treasure it so well."

"Would that I were in Scotland!" she cried. "Mistress of my heritage, and supported by such men as you! Ay me! were I there once again, I'd choose no silly lad for consort—but a gentleman, wise and venerable—one who could play well the

boards of chess—one who'd guard those who were best guarded—with respect and compassion."

Her face was undoubtedly beautiful now; she had the fairy gift of summoning supreme fascination at will. She displayed this very rarely with those whom she disliked and feared; indeed, she was wont to tell her confidants that the effort cost too great a pain. But to-day her mood was very kindly; and she owed my lord for many courtesies. And if Fortune helped her, after so many sad failures, she would always give him pleasant thoughts.

There was a slight squint of the left eye; it detracted nowise from her charm; indeed to most men it added piquancy. In the times when she wished to delight folk, this peculiarity became more obvious. Secretary Naue, seeing it accentuated, cursed jealously under his breath, and shrugged his handsome shoulders.

"Were I Queen in earnest," she said, "a man should readily put away his wife—for shrewishness above all things. Think, my lord of Shrewsbury, if you were again mateless! And your dame's a vile scold, and full to the lip of bitter suspicions. Yester-

night she flounced, like a termagant, into my chamber—hunting in the closets and crying where had *my* love gone! I bethought myself of France and of my first husband. ‘To Heaven!’ said I. Whereat your Bess flew from the place, shrieking like to a woman of Billingsgate Bank!”

The Earl’s mouth was wry; none knew better than he how gross were the virago’s imputations. She had a plausible tongue; she had no shame in instancing before his children proofs of her husband’s falseness. Her influence had alienated the affections of his eldest son—life at the Lodge was one continuous turmoil. But despite Mary’s charm, despite the beauty that was so lustrous to-day, his loyalty to Elizabeth was not affected.

“Wedlock’s a sorry state,” he said. “Were I free, no other woman should call me husband.”

She bent towards him. “ ‘Tis wisest,” she said mischievously; “and pretty Nell Britten, at Whitley, should satisfy any man! A rustic beauty—an admirable light-of-love! Even your lady views her complacently. Only when you turn to women of higher rank does rage boil in her veins.”

He changed the subject abruptly. "Since you have never used this path before," he said, "let me point out the houses of our country gentry. Yonder's Padley, where live the Fitzherberts—already suspected of harbouring priests—and laying trouble in store."

The Queen's anger rose; she averted her face; Naue saw viperish bitterness in its expression; nor did she speak save in answer to questions until they had reached the little town of Castleton, where the keep of the Peverells, still almost intact, frowned from its precipitous hill. At the inn, a great thatched place, whose host had received word of their coming not more than an hour agone, they dismounted, and passing to the private parlour the Queen was served with her women to refreshments; and after she had rested a while, my lord led the way to the mouth of the Devil's Cave, a vast place that burrows deep into the earth's entrails. In the immense vaulted entrance that sloped down to a narrow low-pitched doorway, the tents of a tribe of gipsies were pitched; but by the Earl's order, their occupants had all been

huddled into the church, so that nought unseemly might occur during the Royal visit.

Torches of pine-bark, brought from Sheffield, were lighted by the guards. The roughly-made door was opéted, and the crowd passed into the strait, steeply-descending passage that led to the heart of the hill. The Queen's voice was raised unduly high, as if she desired to test the echoes of the place; the dancing light of the torches showed that her colour had faded, but that her eyes sparkled like diamonds.

Her hand rested in the crook of my lord's arm; after they had crept together beneath a low hanging rock, she pressed his elbow warmly.

"What if yon rock should fall," she said—"fall and make us all prisoners alike? Then would be no Queen nor Earl—ladies nor gentlemen! All would be as God made us—and I warrant all skeletons before the world dug us out. A quiet, tranquil death—no leeches cutting and embalming. . . ."

Lord Shrewsbury shivered. "A bed of down for me," he said, "everything in orderly decency——"

"I shall not die abed," she said in a low voice. "The woman who suckled me had the second-sight—no picking of the sheets for me! Shrewsbury, there have been times when I felt grateful—remember that I told you so—that some day you shall be rewarded."

They had reached the bank of a black stream that shone like a mirror and prattled huskily. A punt lay there; several of my lord's men were covering the interior with carpets. The first torch-bearers entered, crouching low, and passed to the further bank; the punt returned, and the Queen, with Shrewsbury and Naue and her women, were steered slowly across. Afterwards they crept along a natural tunnel to a huge cavern, from whose invisible roof drops of ice-cold water pattered heavily upon their heads and shoulders.

"Here," said my lord, "was in long-forgotten days the lair of a robber. Climb the side, my lads—show us that there is nought but darkness overhead."

The Queen pressed his arm again. "My lord," she exclaimed, in affected fright, "you have chosen

poor torches! Sure, the pit of Hell itself were better lighted!"

She leaned upon him heavily. "The rheum hath risen to my side," she said. "Let us rest here—let us go no further."

If she were in pain, her countenance was well under command; my lord saw laughter in her eyes, saw her small white teeth sparkling, felt her warm, perfumed breath, that came in white clouds, stirring the thin hairs of his beard.

"How would your lady protest, did she see me thus!" she whispered. "Oh, Shrewsbury, for liberty and love!"

The light of the torches grew ever fainter and fainter; one sizzled and went out; the others glowed red, sending forth no shooting flames. Gilbert Talbot, my lord's son, cried for more light; men blew upon the twisted bark without success.

"'Tis the damp air—the droppings from the roof," cried the Queen. "I am afeard; call my women! A cordial!"

The last torches died, and the place was in utter darkness; men fumbled for their tinder-boxes;

here and there a sullen glow followed the spark. The Queen groped for her women—caught Mistress Seaton by the cloak. Then her right hand was touched reverentially, and the palm raised to the lips of one who crouched behind a boulder. In another moment a strong arm was around her waist, and without hesitation she began to walk hurriedly over the broken ground.

"I have the eye of a cat," she murmured. "I see you, Tony, through the darkness—"

"Hush!" whispered the man. "A word might bring them on our track. . . . Wait, madam, till we're in the open, riding to Scotland."

A hurly-burly of shouts arose; the clicking of flint and steel grew ever louder and louder. Shrewsbury's voice, high-pitched and nasal, cried: "Guard the Queen!"

"'Twas well done," she said triumphantly. "Folk of his own household traitors to him! The fox shall pay highly for his earth! Tony . . . already I smell the heather—already the warm sun beats upon me. For once in my poor life to ride sans guard, sans thought of barred doors at the end of my jour-

ney. To-night we'll rest in the wilds. . . . God's sky our roof."

He felt with his left hand along the silken clue; ever and anon the arm about her waist pressed downwards so that she might lower her head. The tumult of voices grew ever fainter and fainter.

"Naue shall be given a high position in my country," she said. "'Twas his thought—the exchanging of my lord's torches, and the damping of the tinder. No light till those from the outer earth come to seek! The guards at the gate drugged with nightshade in their ale. . . . How far to walk for the horses?"

"Scarce a mile," he replied. "In the Winnats—amongst the rocks there my lads wait. The fleetest mares in all the country. . . . Then away over the moors—four days—and you are free . . ."

They heard the mournful whisper of the stream. The boat, moored under the archway, jarred against the rough stone. Babington went to his knees and began to untie the knots of the rope. As he lifted the Queen to the cushioned thwart, a strange, subtle noise, like laughter that ended in gasping, drew

a stifled cry from her lips; a draught of cold air passed; something splashed in the invisible water.

Her teeth began to chatter. "A flitter-mouse has gone by," she said.

Tony groped in the bottom of the punt; then muttered a dull curse. "The pole's gone," he said. "There's treachery!"

The Queen's hands rose to her heart. "There shall be no treachery," she whispered. "Now that freedom is so near, nought shall hinder us."

Babington lowered himself over the side of the punt; the water was but waist-deep; but the current was strong with the late floods, and he had much ado to preserve his footing. He strove with all his might to turn the punt, so that its further end might touch the opposite bank; but spite of all it would not move.

The Queen heard the hissing of a breath; her elbow, suddenly moved, came in contact with a human head. Someone was standing near the inner bank, clinging fiercely to the side of the punt. She took from her girdle a little silver-handled stiletto, and stabbed through the blackness. The flesh

yielded ; at the same moment the punt swung round, making, with the stream, towards the low-browed opening. In another minute it was wedged firmly between two stubborn rocks.

Babington drew himself slowly from the water, and knelt at the Queen's side.

"The clue is broken," he said. "We have failed."

"And one hath followed us all the while," she replied. "I thrust out my bodkin—warm blood spirted over my wrist. God grant that the wretch hath gotten his death-blow!"

Then she raised her hands to his face and drew it close to her own. "All's over," she said ; "'tis but my usual fortune. Kiss me, Tony—kiss your poor friend upon the lips. Ay, my lad—my Tony."

He began to sob ; she held his face against her bosom. "I knew not till now how I loved you," she said. . . . "And I be tired—tired to the very heart! I'l d ne'er have reached Scotland—not I!"

"If our horses had failed," he murmured, "my arms would have borne you. And now—'tis but another waiting—in the end you shall escape."

She rose suddenly, striking her head against the roof. "They are coming," she said. "They have gotten lights again—one tinder-box hath not been spoiled. I be minded to throw myself into this water—to close my eyes for ever . . . "

Babington had descended once more into the stream. "There are many hiding-places," he pleaded. "One that I alone know—where I have lain in waiting for to-day. Food is there; we could lie hidden for weeks—"

"And starve slowly," said the Queen; "though starving's nought to me—'tis of you I think. Go, for the love of Christ!"

The lad had drawn her over the side of the punt, and reeled with her to the further bank. There, holding her hand, he conducted her carefully along the narrow gallery.

"My lord dare not follow," he said triumphantly. "Keep your strength, madam; in a brief while we shall be in the open."

"Ay," said the Queen, "with bandogs in close pursuit. And I be old, Tony, an old woman. Often before have I felt the chill of my years; but never

as I feel it now. Leave me—it may not be known who has striven for my saving. The traitor hath not seen your face."

She stopped resolutely. "They are crossing Styx," she said. "I command you to go. Another time—you may help me—my folk are faithful—your letters will come constant as ever. Go!"

He strove to draw her along; but she stood rigid. "Tony," she said, "another kiss. . . . I am not to be constrained, and I will go no further. Farewell, my lad—think me not graceless. Farewell and farewell."

The lights neared again; she thrust Babington away, and sat down on a great stone, covering her face with her hands. She heard him groan bitterly; then the sound of shouting drowned his hurrying footsteps, and she turned her face in the opposite direction. Lord Shrewsbury climbed the steep path—a yeoman preceding him, with a torch made of laces torn from the men's attire. The Earl was pale and angry; he gasped with relief as she rose to meet him.

"God send the day when her Majesty move you

from my charge!" he cried. "'Tis near—but not too near. A harsher gaoler—one who would bind you in chains——"

The Queen laughed loudly. "You are foremost of all men in gallantry!" she retorted. "Yet, I warn you to hold your peace. What would my good sister determine if she knew that you brought me to a place where men lay in ambush for me?" She clapped her hands together. "Methinks your queen herself hath laid this plot—in truth I fear that the rascals who seized me were paid to drag me to some hideous precipice—to fling me into everlasting blackness! Nay, my good keeper, no word—perchance you too were in the scheme! How my mind grasps all! This was to be the end; and I, denied even decent sepulture, was doomed to die unshriven in the Devil's Cave!"

The Earl, in a paroxysm of rage, stamped his feet upon the wet ground. "Peace, madam!" he stammered. "You shall know more of this hereafter. One man alone helped you, and you called him by his name. So much is known, and, by the rood!

Anthony Babington shall suffer, and the lips that kissed yours shall ere long kiss the dust!"

The Queen's raillery was not repeated. "He hath kissed dust in kissing me!" she said. "The air is full of death and corruption!"

She swayed slightly, and the Earl, moved unexpectedly to compassion, offered his arm for her support. But she shook her head, and fenced foolishly with her hands.

"One of my people, my lord," she said. "Let Naue come forward—a son of France."

The secretary stumbled unwillingly from behind the cluster of watching folk. The Queen touched her eyes, as if to clear away some dimness. She moved closer; but seeing on his right cheek a bleeding wound, she screamed faintly, and without another word laid her hand on Shrewsbury's arm, and tottered slowly by his side.

Dryas and Lady Greenleaf.

DRYAS AND LADY GREENLEAF.

LADY GREENLEAF crooked her arm through the handle of a shallow wicker basket, and fluttered from the still-room to the garden. Noel was sitting there on the grass beside the statue of Ceres—a Renaissance monstrosity begirt with impossible fruits and flowers. When his wife appeared, the clerky old man rose, closed his volume of "Hakluyt," and pushed back his gold-rimmed spectacles. Although they had been wedded two years, he still found something irresistibly tempting in her childishness; and as the morning air was brisk and full of sunshine, his sluggish blood moved less slowly than usual.

"Let us race together?" he said, drawing out his shagreen-covered repeater. "To the bowling-green—I will give you two minutes in advance."

She shrugged her shoulders, pursed a mouth

quaintly beautiful. "I'll not race to-day, little one," she said laughingly; "but, if you wish you may help me to gather roses. I need this basket brimful."

He sauntered beside her, past the knots of herbs to the court where the water-roses grew. These flowers were very big and heavy, although each had only five petals. No thorns rose from the plump stems—velvety to the touch as her own smooth fingers. The fragrance spread about like the breath of a perfumed brazier; of late Lady Greenleaf had perused the "Eastern Tales," and this sweetness reminded her of the joyous life of that sultana (the mother of White Hassan) who held sole dominion over a stalwart spouse's love. And so intent was she upon the moving pictures, that when Noel's hand toyed with the laces at her throat she forgot even to pout.

When the basket was filled, she lifted it to a balustrade, and drawing back her loose sleeves, buried white arms in that fragrant bed, and moved them fantastically, so that it seemed as though two Cupids struggled there. Noel watched her intently, his pale grey eyes alight with pleasure. Ere the

marriage, which he had made after a life spent in intrigue and mild devilry, he had known many fair women, and heretofore had thought with gentle lightness of her beauty; but as she stood there smiling, ivory-skinned, flushed, small-breasted—a semblance of ripening fruit, for the first time he acknowledged her perfection. Her prune silk gown hung in loose folds, the skirt uplifted so that her little feet in their green shoes and stockings with silver clocks were discovered; her lawn chemisette scarce veiled the warmness of her neck and bosom.

Of a sudden it seemed to him that the plump arms curling amongst the roses were young babes that she had borne.

"Ah, if 'twere God's truth!" he murmured.

She understood, and withdrew her arms sharply, as if a snake had lain amongst the flowers.

"I do not wish for children!" she cried. "You are my little one. Sure you are happy?"

"Ay, child, a thousand times more happy than I deserve. You are the paragon of wives!"

Again his hand plucked her laces; this time she drew away.

"Carry the roses for me, little one," she said.

On the way back to the house, they passed a niche in the box hedge, where stood a leaden statue which of late had been newly gilded. It was of Dryas, the son of Pan and Venus; Girardin, the Frenchman, had made it for a gift to Noel's great grand-sire, that time he was Ambassador at Paris. The sunlight fell hotly upon it; the brilliancy threw out a metallic vapour. And through the trembling of this vapour, Lady Greenleaf noted for the first time the virile comeliness of the faun—the god-like head with its wreath of green vine-leaves that almost hid the sire's gift of goatish ears—the massive neck with jutting Adam's apple.

As she paused, one came with a letter for Noel. He unfolded it very tediously, and found word that his sister, of Stoney Marlbro', had been stricken with palsy, and that it was imperative for him to visit her at once. He read this aloud to his wife; but she could scarce withdraw her attention from the bewitching faun.

"I must ride at once," he said wryly; "'twill be the

first time you and I have been apart since our nuptials. Wilt be afraid, child?"

She shook her head and turned to watch him out of sight. The basket of roses lay on the ground; when she was alone, she chose the finest flowers and, tip-toeing on the pedestal, stuck them between the leaves of the wreath. Then, with a murmur of shame, she hastened after her husband so that she might speed him on his journey.

Late that afternoon, as she sat reading her book of romances, a coach drew up in the forecourt, and, looking from a window, she saw a gallant youth alight and mount the balustraded staircase. She returned to her book, and waited with some curiosity until the arrival was announced by the house-steward.

"If it pleases your ladyship, a foreign gentleman begs your hospitality. He declares himself godson to my lord. He is bound for the Court—in two days he is to be received by the King. He reached the Quay only this afternoon, and if 'twill not incommodate your ladyship overmuch, desires to rest here till the morrow."

Ere he ceased, the stranger entered. She rose

and curtsied, watching him from demurely lowered eyes. He was tall and fair-skinned; there was a soft, almost invisible, down on his upper lip. Moreover, he was dressed admirably, in a fashion such as she had never seen, for Noel resolutely kept her away from the temptations of the world.

"This house is at your service, sir," she said courteously. "My husband has been called away to his sister's bedside; but what poor hospitality we can afford is yours. Pray, Mr. Mompesson" (this to the house-steward) "see that the gentleman is shown to a guest-chamber."

When they were gone, she began to make preparations for his entertainment. Such responsibility had never before fallen to her share; but she ordered a dainty supper, and when all was ready lighted the table-candles with her own hand. In the withdrawing-room, she found him indolently strumming on Noel's guitar. She had chosen to wear a new gown of ivory and silver brocade, and had twisted the Greenleaf ropes of pearl around her neck. The stranger started with amazement; he had imagined nought so exquisite away from his own country.

"But—truly—you are my lord's daughter?" he said.

She laughed gently, lifting her fan to hide a pretty blush. At table she strove to make him talk; but he was curiously embarrassed, and could only respond foolishly to her gay sallies. Nevertheless, his eyes sought hers continually. Afterwards they built pagodas of cards—or rather, she attempted to instruct him in the art; but his fingers trembled so that the great chamber rang with her mirthful protests. Finally, she bade him tune the guitar and play a duet with her, and then sat to the new harpsichord Noel had bought her for her last—her eighteenth—birthday. So full of tenderness was that music, that her gaiety disappeared, and she grew silent as her guest.

When she retired, the moon was shining brightly through the windows. At the door he kissed her hand, and would not release it for a few moments. She hastened to her chamber and disrobed, to lie tossing from side to side of the bed. The time crept on very slowly; she heard the clocks strike eleven, then twelve. A subtle fever burned in her veins,

a fever that troubled her so acutely that ere long she found unendurable the close air of the house. Passionate thoughts flocked to her brain; she painted warm-hued vignettes in which she saw herself tasting a happiness hitherto unknown.

At last, overwrought with excitement, she rose suddenly, and donned her pantoufles and threw about her shoulders an Indian shawl; then she went down to the garden. Another was there—one who, like herself, was unable to rest; on her approach he hid behind the screen of clipped box.

She paced to and fro, murmuring. The night air was cool and sweet with the dewy roses. The glittering of the gilded statue startled her once more; she went to the niche, pressed the smooth forehead with her open palm.

“ ‘Twas thou who wakened this folly in me!” she said. “ Thou, who art nothing but a leaden image! ”

She thrust away the withered roses, replacing them with fresh buds wet and heavy. When this was done, she went to the tall jet d'eau, and leaning over the rim of the basin strove to catch reflection of her face. The moonlit ripples shook beauty into gro-

tesqueness ; she returned again to the hedge and threw herself on the sward at Dryas's feet.

"Surely there is some truth in ancient tales," she said. "Why should it not be that the thing which hath wrought this strangeness in me, may at times be warm with human life . . . 'Tis the likeness of a perfect man—a god!"

She rose, raised her arms and caught the faun about the neck, kissing the brow where her hand had pressed. The metal was key-cold to her lips ; with many sighs she went away again.

A boy's laughing face moved in the shadow ; his eyes followed her past the fountain to the sunken court where the cedars grew ; then, seeing her rest there on the lowermost stair, he moved to the niche and swung the gilded Dryas aside and stood himself upon the pedestal. . . .

Lady Greenleaf was tortured with fantastic madness. Her breast rose and fell quickly ; her hands were out-thrust as if to embrace. About her shoulders, from which the shawl had slipped, her hair hung in long tresses, swayed to-and-fro by the light breeze.

Ere long she began to weep and to beat her bosom.
“True happiness is denied me!” she whimpered.
“Only to-day hath the sleeping love awakened!”

Once more she hastened to the niche. The wind had scattered the roses, the faun’s head was unadorned. She knelt, her hands pressed to her face.
“Waken! waken!” she prayed.

The strenuous note in her voice startled her; her head drooped; the tears trickled faster between her fingers and fell to the grass.

“Have compassion on me! Thou alone hast brought forth my love!”

There came a sound as if one near by sighed in deep delight . . . surely ‘twas the soul, coming down from that pastoral heaven, where the demigods sing and play in everlasting noon tide. She redoubled her clamours.

“Waken, ‘tis a woman who cries!”

She rose fearfully; she threw her arms around his neck—found it no longer cold, but pulsing with living veins. For the first moment she was awed; then her voice rose with sharper pleading.

The glittering arms were outstretched slowly; she

felt the motion, but saw nought, for her eyes were dimmed. She heard the beating of a heart; she felt a warm breath touching her cheek.

“One kiss, such as thou givest the nymphs of heaven,” she murmured.

The faun’s lips met hers; one hand buried itself in her hair. At the contact an odd fear overcame her; she remembered the story of Jove and Semele, and with a sudden motion freed herself and flew, trembling, back to the house. Another time, perchance, when the glory had grown more familiar . . . who knows? She closed her chamber door, threw herself upon the bed, and fell into a heavy sleep, from which she did not waken until noontide.

She looked around strangely. Her pantoufles lay at the bedside, as when she had first retired; nothing in the place was changed. She went to the window and gazed along the vista of the rose-garden, and saw the gilded Dryas still resting in his niche.

She began to laugh so loudly that her waiting-woman was alarmed, and ran in from the ante-room.

“I have had the oddest dream!” cried Lady Greenleaf. “A miracle of a dream!”

The abigail pressed her to reveal it, bidding her hurry meanwhile, for the guest was leaving ; but she laughed again.

" Nay, 'tis all mine own ; none shall ever know it."

She dressed hastily, lest her husband's godson should suspect some courtesy. As soon as she was made ready, she went to the library where he waited, and made due apologies to him.

" An incubus hath troubled me," she said. " I slept ill and woke late."

Her eyes met his ; he was smiling and blushing.

" The most wonderful dream woman ever had ! " she continued, drawing him to the window. " You see yon gilded statue ? Methought 'twas tenanted by a soul—a god's soul."

Such things are possible," he replied. " Have not we the precedent of the sculptor and the maid of stone ? "

" Ay, but that was in the days when the gods really visited the earth. My dream was stranger."

He grasped her fingers roughly ; she withdrew them with some sharpness.

" We countrywomen are simple," she said. " The

little courtesies of your world are unknown to us. Ah, they have brought your coach!—is it not in your power to stay longer? I am afraid that your visit has been unconscionably dull. Will not you dine—perhaps my husband may return soon?"

"I should be most happy if I could; but to-morrow I must be at Court. I bade your servants not waken you, though I hated the thought of leaving *sans adieu*. As for your entertainment, I was never so well content; I shall bear to my death the recollection of your kindness.

"My lord will be sorely disappointed," she said.
"He hath often spoken of you."

For reply he stooped and gave her a warm kiss.
She drew back, white with annoyance.

"You are officious!" she cried.

"Do not you remember?" he whispered.

She had regained her composure. "It was indeed an honour to entertain you," she said, in a voice filled with wonder. "And now, when I reflect on my endeavours to instruct you in the art of building pagodas, I can only praise your patience."

The house-steward came to the doorway.

"Your lordship's coach waits."

The lad offered his arm; Lady Greenleaf touched it lightly and accompanied him to the forecourt. Ere taking his place, he murmured in her ear: "Do not you remember?"

She frowned, racking her brains. "I cannot understand, unless it be that the music was excellent."

So he smiled gravely, and kissed her hand in a very formal way. Inside the coach he leaned back on the cushions, gazing with perplexed eyes into nothing. . . .

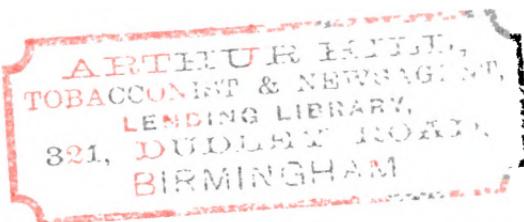
Noel returned mourning before nightfall; but she drove away all his grief for the loss of his sister, with a thousand quaint descriptions of the gambols of fauns and nymphs, of the shower of coins that fell upon Jove's mistress, and of Venus's shame in the golden net. Such scenes Verrio had depicted on the ceilings, and the walls of the staircases; but Lady Greenleaf talked as if her own eyes had beheld.

"You might have dwelt in classic times!" said Noel.

He held her at arm's length, wondering at the beauty that had ripened even since yesterday.

"Who knows that I was not a goddess or a nymph?" said she.

The Grotto at Ravensdale.



THE GROTTO AT RAVENSDALE.

THREE weeks after the wedding of Peregrine Fury and Lady Mary Tufton, daughter of the Earl of Thanet, the young couple left Newbottle (my lord's Northamptonshire seat), and journeyed in a new coach and six to Ravensdale, the bridegroom's estate in one of the most remote Peakland valleys. Of the journey they knew but little ; each being vastly in love, and deeming no prospect in the world comparable with the reflection to be found in the other's eyes.

Mrs. Tryphena Wilbraham, a kinswoman of the young lady—one of those useful spinsters upon whom devolve the smoothing of other folk's paths—had been sent, the day after the nuptials, to see that the house was set in readiness for one who had been accustomed to luxury from her birth. Peregrine Fury had not visited the place since his infancy ; the

late owner, his uncle, Sir Agabus Webbe, having alienated the affections of all his relatives by a middle-age marred by eccentricity of no very pleasant nature.

For a life of Sir Agabus, one must consult the third volume of *The British Magazine, or Monthly Repository for Gentlemen and Ladies*, wherein is a brief biography, entitled: "The Character of a Miser, founded on fact, though veiled under a fictitious name." There it will be seen that a conjugal catastrophe changed a harmless gentleman into a parsimonious hermit, whose whole energy was devoted to almost incredible cheeseparing. For well-nigh twenty years no fire burned on the hearths of Ravensdale Lodge; the doors and gates of house and garden were ever kept locked and barred; only one servant (an elderly female) was permitted to sleep beneath the roof. Eggs with cresses from the stream made the baronet's usual diet, though it was occasionally varied by a partridge or rabbit trapped in the garden. Throughout those years "Fucus" (so the Grub Street writer called him), never stirred beyond the confines of his park, or looked upon a stranger's face. He died of some slight complaint, which any country

chirurgeon might have remedied. And after his demise, it was discovered that he had tripled his securities, and, dying intestate, left enough to make his heir one of the wealthiest men in the kingdom.

At the time of his uncle's death, Peregrine was page-in-waiting to Frederick, Prince of Wales, and at Leicester House had frequently met Lady Mary Tufton. His position, however, was not such as found favour in the eyes of my Lord Thanet; since his patrimony consisted of nought save a few hundred acres of Lincolnshire marsh, and a green-lichened, moated house over-run with rats. But the great windfall caused the father to veer round suddenly (in sober truth the earl often played weather-cock), and welcome young Master Fury with a stately blessing.

Lady Mary had inherited considerable beauty from her mother, the Marquis of Halifax's daughter. She was tall and slender—indeed, her height came to within an inch of Peregrine's—with a dainty silken skin and languishing, melting blue eyes. She had loved him for a full twelvemonth, and had been much troubled by her father's strenuous endeavours

to wed her to one of her own rank. She had little of the virgin's foolish meekness—more than once she had threatened to enter a convent unless she could have the man of her own choice. When the death of Sir Agabus set all matters right, I dare swear that no happier girl could be found anywhere.

Peregrine was, in man's fashion, as pleasant to look upon as she—a strongly-built lad, with the frankest, handsomest face, quite unspoiled by the time he had spent in the artificial atmosphere of the Court. He bade fair to become a greatly-respected country-gentleman, who would sit in Parliament, and maybe towards his latter end be rewarded with a barony.

At Newhaven Inn, a great posting-house on the Manchester road, within two stages of home, Mrs. Tryphena herself, who had been to the county-town to arrange about the repairing of some hangings, joined them, and shared their carriage for the remainder of the journey. They did not resent her presence as they would have done that of a less kindly woman; for she was mistress of consummate tact, and had ever been noted for her pleasing blind-

ness to the foibles of young lovers. During the greater part of their drive together, she sat very primly gazing from the nearest window, and not until they came in sight of the river Darrand for the first time did she make any remark beyond comments upon her delight in seeing them again. Then, in a pause of the young couple's "little language," she leaned forward and took the wife's hand.

"'Tis the strangest house I ever dreamed of," she said. "Sir Agabus, whatever may have been his faults (and I hold miserliness one of the worst that any man is capable of), possessed a virtue which atones for much, according to an old woman's way of thinking. When I reached Ravensdale, I found not as much as a footstool unswathed in brown holland! 'Tis true that dust lay thick upon everything; but the fabrics wherewith the furniture's covered are fresh as when he bought anew for his wife's homecoming. The dame who played housekeeper—lacquey—God knows what to the late master—assures me that the dust-sheets had not been removed for a score years, and that her chief duty in autumn was the making of little bags of lavender

(there's thousands of 'em all piled now in an empty chamber), to keep away the moths. The garden's in as perfect order as the house; on all the temples and belvederes—I vow there's as many here as at Stow Park—the roofs are as perfect as if built but yesterday."

Lady Mary turned happy eyes upon her husband. "And yet you never told me——" she began.

"I remember nought of Ravensdale," he replied; "since I was not more than year old on my former visit. All will be as new to me as to you; we shall spend many merry hours in peering into every hole and corner."

"A new Adam and Eve in a formal Eden!" cried the spinster, who was something of a wit. "With not even a blindworm to play tempter! But, to speak plainly, the domain is vastly pleasant—all that I hold against it is its entire seclusion amongst the limestone hills. You'll be as far removed from the world as if you'd crossed the seas to Virginia. . . . And now we're about to climb Black Harry—in my belief the highest hill of these parts. Another four miles and we're at the Lodge."

They crossed the Darrand, low with summer drought, at an ancient ford, and began to ascend the steep deep-rutted road, which soon became little more than a track across the open heath. A magnificent prospect opened—north, east and west rolled billowing expanses of primeval moorland ; the south being occupied by the bright Darrand valley and the serrated Edge of Stanage. The red sun was setting behind a conical mound ; a soft breeze swayed the white cotton-grass in the hollows.

To the right of the hill-top a narrow clough descended to Ravensdale, whose concave was now filled with a mist faintly rose-coloured, pierced with the tops of heavy-foliaged trees and the grotesquely twisted chimneys of the Lodge. Peregrine and his wife (his arm around her waist) leaned from the open window and looked downwards. They had passed out of the warm sunlight now ; Lady Mary shivered ; he drew her closer to his side.

“ ‘Tis like an enchanted world ! ” she said. “ Aunt Tryphena was right in calling it an Eden. There’s no sign of life here.”

“ We’re to bring life,” whispered the lover. “ We’re

to people this world. And there'll be nō angels with flaming swords . . . ”

The coach passed suddenly through the rising curtain of mist, and at last the strange beauty of the valley became visible. The house, built in the latter part of Elizabeth's reign, was stately and large—its frontispiece containing more of window than of wall—around lay gardens and a park where the sward was green as moss in winter, and where a shallow stream meandered level with its banks until it threaded a ravine that clove the rocky bank of the Darrand. A lake near by the terrace was full of yellow and white lilies; in the centre a tall Neptune spirted thin jets from the end of his trident.

The young husband and wife talked in low voices now (somehow it seemed as if the time for idle prattle were past), until the coach drew up afront the colonnade, where an old, old woman, gowned in sober black with white apron and cap, stood curtseying.

“ This is Law, the housekeeper,” said Mrs. Tryphena. “ She holds it her duty to lift her mistress across the threshold, according to the custom

of the family. The good soul—as faithful a creature as ever lived, for she starved in Sir Agabus's day, rather than leave him in utter solitude—hath rehearsed the scene more than once."

The dame, smiling as genially as a face whose nose and chin almost met would permit, took Lady Mary in her arms and tottered with her from the coach to the hall.

"'Twas so I bore Sir Agabus's lady," she said breathlessly; "a beauty, too, though not to be spoken of with you. I bid you welcome, sir and madam, and may God grant this be a happier house!"

Mrs. Tryphena now led the way, past the smirking newly-hired servants, to the dining-parlour, where, lighted with wax candles in silver sticks, the table was laid for supper. There, only doffing their travelling cloaks, they sat and spent the next hour in refreshment and talk. Afterwards Peregrine drew his wife to the window, and they stood with linked arms looking out upon the formal garden, white beneath the crescent moon.

"Eden in night-time!" said Lady Mary. "In truth I believe there's no finer home in all the world

than ours! What think you of a walk amongst yonder flowers? A good housewife'd not be content till she'd passed through every chamber of the place, but I'm no good housewife. And I'm cramped with our long journey—'twould refresh us both."

He tied the strings of her cloak, and, with her arm still in his, conducted her from the house and down a great stone staircase to the French garden, where they walked to and fro for more than an hour, till both yawned sleepily, and were minded to go bedward.

As they reached the terrace, Peregrine saw a young gentleman, dressed in garments of antiquated cut, standing beside the mounting-block, holding in his right hand a rose that glowed like a living ruby. He was watching them intently, his eyes lighted with a yellow gleam. The young husband, curious because of a stranger's presence, moved towards him; but he glided in perfect silence to the shadow of a gigantic cedar.

Lady Mary gave a little cry. "Tell me why you started?" she said. "You have seen someone . . ."

"Ay," he replied, "the oddest creature—see, there

he walks down yonder yew-path, quivering like to a leaf! Some friend, perchance, of Sir Agabus—come to pay compliments, and taken with shyness."

"Let's follow," she cried. "No visitor must go unwelcomed on our first night."

Then hand in hand they ran along the path, catching ever and anon glimpses of the stranger, who, despite Peregrine's halloos, went on and on without turning.

"As deaf as an adder!" exclaimed Peregrine. "By the Lord! the fellow is as eccentric as old Sir Agabus himself!"

They stopped short, each with a gasp of surprise; for the yew-alley terminated abruptly there, at the entrance of a cave whose roof and sides were covered with great shells. The man was no longer visible; nothing stirred in that mysterious archway save a tiny stream that wound, clear as crystal, over the floor of variegated pebbles.

"He's gone!" cried Peregrine. "How, I cannot tell—unless there's some opening in the hedge!"

Lady Mary's face had grown of a sudden very strained and haggard. "Let us go back," she said.

"I am afraid. I saw him pass into the grotto. Oh, come, Peregrine," (her voice broke foolishly), "I do not like this place in the moonlight . . . I am weary—cold——"

He lifted her in his arms and carried her to the house and up to her bedchamber. Whilst the abigail undressed her, he wandered aimlessly through the suites, until by some odd chance he came across the housekeeper's parlour, where good Mrs. Law sat sipping her nightcap of sloe-cordial. She rose as he entered; but being of a genial nature, he bade her resume her pleasant occupation, and chose for himself a chair at the further end of the hearth.

"We came upon a stranger in the garden," he said. "A young man attired in the quaintest clothes, who disappeared in a way I cannot account for, near by a grotto with a stream."

"Dear God!" muttered the woman, lifting her hand to her heart. "Dear God! there's no way by which anyone could have entered after your honour's coming; for at edge-o'-dark all the gates were locked. It must have been the trees—the clipped yews cast marvellous shadows."

"Not shadows with eyes that burn like coals," said Peregrine. "Nay, 'twas a living man, who carried a rose in his hand. Moreover he was not a little handsome both of face and figure."

Mrs. Law crossed herself. "Sir Agabus's lady once spoke of such an one," she said; "but none of the housefolk e'er came upon him. And 'tis more than twenty years since she died."

"So it could not be Sir Agabus's lady's friend," said her master laughingly. "To-morrow, maybe, the gentleman will come again, in full daylight, and we shall jest over our first meeting. Prythee, what cave is that we came to? There's shells there, and the inmost wall's made of stones roughly piled."

The woman's forehead puckered like the shell of a walnut. "'Tis the grotto made by Sir Agabus for a whim of his lady's," she replied, "and 'twas there that she died. . . . Lord, sir, I entreat you not to speak of't to my mistress—sure 'twould set her against the place. My late master built the screen himself, afterwards—carrying each stone from the Holy Circle on the hilltop."

She promised loquacity; but Peregrine, mindful of his wife, bade her good-night, and returned to the chamber, where he slept soundly until the valley was warm with morning sunlight.

The greater part of that day the young folk spent in Mrs. Tryphena's company, rambling through the house, and wondering at the many curious portraits of long-since dead men and women. Sir Agabus's wife proved most to Lady Mary's liking; for the painter had depicted to perfection her exquisite pride of countenance and bearing. There was a marked resemblance between the two women—both had the dainty colour and long tapering fingers of patrician inheritance; but the living wife was lacking in a peculiar aloofness of the eyes, which in the other suggested that the mind dwelt overmuch upon something vague and distant. A picture of earlier date hung beside—that of a comely youth with a Roman nose and a pouting red mouth, whose right hand held a rose, whilst the other toyed carelessly with the diamond buttons of a white waistcoat embellished with fantastical needlework.

“How strange ‘tis,” observed Lady Mary pen-

sively ; "here are two full of life, and yet gone for ever, with scarce a trace left of aught they did!"

Just then one came with word that the bailiff desired an interview ; so Peregrine left his wife and went to the gun-room, where he was soon deep in discussion concerning a suitable breed of cattle wherewith to stock the park. Lady Mary and Mrs. Tryphena left the house and loitered through the garden, pausing at last before the grotto at the end of the yew-alley, where the girl told the odd experience of the preceding evening.

Mrs. Tryphena declared herself a believer in ghosts. "Surely 'twas some restless spirit—a bachelor, perhaps, whom love of you hath driven to the shades!"

Lady Mary shook her head. "The only suitor I ever had opportunity of denying was corpulent and elderly," she said. "My Lord Wollaston still lives in the flesh—he gave me the wedding gift of Indian diamonds. . . . This is the place where the gentleman disappeared—see the shells over yonder are wrought in the motto: 'Love once, love ever!'"

After a while she began to examine the barrier

of stone that formed the inner wall, and touching one of the topmost, caused it to fall, leaving a hole as big as a child's head. Thereupon Mrs. Tryphena, being of a curious nature, peeped through, then fell back with affected dismay.

"La!" she cried. "I could have sworn that a man stood there! One with a face as white as death itself!"

Lady Mary, all eagerness, pressed her own face to the opening; but saw nothing but a dim avenue of grey stalactites, lighted by reflections of sunlight from the stream, that came through the chinks of the loose masonry.

"'Tis like to a cathedral aisle!" she said. "I'll bid Peregrine order the removal of these boulders, and this shall be my own retiring place. What if the passage goes into the very entrails of the earth!"

But Mrs. Tryphena laid a hand upon her sleeve. "I could have sworn that someone laughed as you were speaking," she whispered. "Come back into the garden, my pretty——"

Lady Mary drew aside almost petulantly. "Dear aunt," she said, "I dote upon the place. There's the

posy, which'll always remind me of Peregrine, and the air's cool and fresh and sweet——”

At that moment her husband appeared ; and telling him of the vista that lay beyond the stones, she won from him a promise to have the cave reopened ere another day had gone by, and to explore it in her company—with clues and torches, if need be.

So, on the morrow, the barrier being removed, they went there together, and for more than two hours were lost to the upper world, thridding the countless galleries of a marvellous *lusus naturæ*, where the floors were of fine dry sand, and the walls of limestone smooth as ivory. The place was so full of windings that at last both wearily declared that a month might be passed ere its wonders were exhausted.

In the following week the weather grew extraordinarily hot and sultry ; and since Peregrine was much occupied with necessary business, Lady Mary found herself at liberty to spend many hours in her grotto, which in truth was the only cool place in the valley. Her embroidery frame was carried there, and at first she worked laboriously upon a cravat for

her spouse's wearing. Mrs. Tryphena, whom both had entreated to stay permanently at Ravensdale, was assiduously occupied in examining and repairing the contents of the great linen-presses, or supervising the conservation of fruits; whilst Law, in consideration of her faithful services in Sir Agabus's day, still retained nominally the post of housekeeper.

One morning, in the still-room, the old woman found herself constrained to speak of her former mistress's strange ending.

"I like not her ladyship's going so oft to yon cave," she remarked; "since 'twas there Sir Agabus's lady used for to go, whilst she peaked and pined away almost to an anatomy!"

Until now she had been reticent concerning the lady's tragedy; but to-day, as if stirred with dread lest a like misfortune should overtake the young wife, she waxed very confidential, and told Mrs. Tryphena the oddest story . . . It had the effect of sending the spinster hot-foot to the grotto, where she found her niece fast asleep by the embroidery frame; her upturned face smiling mysteriously, as if she dreamed of matters pleasant beyond human

ken. She touched her somewhat roughly on the shoulder.

"You are unwise to sleep here," she said—"the air's cold enough to strike a chill to your bones. Come out into the sun, my dear—why, you have lost all your colour!"

Lady Mary rose, passing her hand drowsily over her eyes. "You cannot let me be!" she said, with a new querulousness. "Is there some wrong in my dreams, that you must spy upon me day after day?"

Mrs. Tryphena stared in wonderment. "'Tis I, Mary," she said—"I, your aunt—you know that I have never spied——"

The girl began to laugh confusedly. "My head's all bewildered," she said. "I thought—I thought 'twas Peregrine himself! And I was far away from here—in a world of my own—a wonderful world, all full of romance."

After they had returned to the Lodge, Mrs. Tryphena contrived a private conversation with the husband.

"I beg of you," she said, "to forbid your wife to frequent the grotto. The place is ill-omened—

'twas there that the lady of Sir Agabus lost her strength—her life; indeed, there's something—I know not what—of the unfortunate——”

He dismissed her objections lightly. “How could I cross one whom I love so well?” he said. “Forbiddances shall never come from me, whose sole desire is to make her happy. Nay, good aunt, listen to no more old-wives' tales——”

“Ay,” interrupted Mrs. Tryphena; “but sure you have not forgotten how on the night you came here, you saw an unknown gentleman?”

“'Twas some hapless fellow with a greeting he was too shy to make, or perhaps some Scotch rebel, making his way across country to the Border. Our sympathies are with such.”

So Mrs. Tryphena went away very discontented, resolved to neglect the household duties that she had taken upon herself, and to accompany her niece whenever she went to the grotto. This, however, met with Lady Mary's disapproval, and ere long the officious spinster found the place entirely deserted save for herself; and with a satisfied mind returned to the thousand avocations of the great house.

But Lady Mary went there privately, and day by day her beautiful colour faded, and she grew more and more listless. The wise elderly folk wrongly attributed this to a natural cause; more than once speech was made to Mrs. Tryphena of the day when Ravensdale Park would echo with *feux-de-joie*, and the distant bells of Hassage Church would chime in blithe announcement to the countryside of the birth of Peregrine's heir.

It was not until autumn was far advanced that the great tragedy occurred. One night, when the air was very still, and the skies covered with a black cloud, Peregrine woke to find himself alone, and after hastily donning his clothes made a fruitless search through the wing devoted to their use, then hurried to Mrs. Tryphena's bedchamber.

"Mary is gone!" he stammered. "I can find her nowhere!"

The aunt rose from her canopied bed, and huddled on a wrapper.

"She cannot have left the house," she said, incredulously; "she must be restless. . . . I will come with you—prythee, do not rouse the servants."

They passed through many other chambers, calling faintly; but found no clue until they came to the hall, where, to the amazement of both, the door hung ajar.

"If she be not indoors," faltered Mrs. Tryphena, "there's but one place where she would go on such a night——"

A lantern stood here upon a table; she lighted its candle and led the way through the garden to the grotto. And in the yew-alley their hearts grew very cold and heavy; for they heard the sound of voices speaking softly.

Peregrine stumbled against Mrs. Tryphena. "She is here, and not alone!" he muttered. "My God! what does it mean?"

The spinster trembled so that she could scarce stand. "'Tis no living man who's with her," she said bravely; "I'll not believe such wickedness——"

But still the voices murmured; one sweet and low and bewitching; the other a faint and incoherent echo of the wife's. The words of both were indistinguishable; but the tones were laden with burning passion. Peregrine caught the lantern from

THE GROTTO AT RAVENSDALE. 147

Mrs. Tryphena's hand, and staggered forward into the blackness; then fell back at sight of Lady Mary sitting on the ground beside the stream, her head bowed to her bosom.

A sharp, bitter cry came from the inner recesses of the place—'twas a woman's voice raised in agony—then a dimness came into Peregrine's eyes, so that he saw his wife no longer.

He leaped forward; two figures hurried ever before him—one cruelly familiar, t'other that of a tall dark man, who laughed and laughed and laughed.

They sped along passages where hitherto no human foot had ever trod; they climbed the steep sides of monstrous caverns; they slipped through narrow apertures, bending almost double where the roof hung low—until at last they reached a vast vault filled with the noise of falling water. There they stopped short where the sandy floor broke, on the verge of a pit, into which a cataract fell from the lip of a jagged rock overhead.

Peregrine put out his hand to grasp the loose sleeve of the woman's gown; ere his fingers closed she turned, discovering a countenance fretted with

an unendurable grief. The man stood with face averted, an arm firmly encircling her waist.

"Ah, do not leave me!" cried the husband.
"Come back—come back—"

The ashen lips moved in silence; one hand strove feebly to remove the imprisoning arm. But her companion drew her closer still, and sprang into the utter blackness of the pit, and Peregrine was left alone.



Hours passed ere Peregrine left the place; hours in which he heard nought save the roaring of the water. The candle guttered—the last spark died as he reached the grotto at the cave's mouth. The sun had risen; all the east was rich with purple and amber clouds. A heavy mist hung over the park; cattle were lowing for milking-time.

Mrs. Tryphena sat on the pebbles beside her niece, whose cheek rested against her shoulder. The old lady did not observe him until his foot touched her skirt.

"Thank God!" he cried hoarsely; "'twas but a

THE GROTTO AT RAVENSDALE. 149

nightmare—the cruellest nightmare man ever knew!
I believed that she had gone for ever!"

He knelt at their side; Mrs. Tryphena held him back with a trembling hand.

"Oh, I am worn with waiting!" she moaned.
"How could you leave me!"

"I have been tricked—some devilry forced me to see . . . Ah, speak to me, wife!"

"Hush!" faltered Mrs. Tryphena. "She has never stirred—she will never stir!"

The Priest's Pavan.

THE PRIEST'S PAVAN.

YESTERNIGHT I took my viol, and made my way over the limestone cliffs to the concave where stand the ruins of Woodsetts, the house Vignola—he who designed Saint Angelo's Castle in Rome—had built beside the fallen abbey, for his boon-fellow, Bate-man de Caus. And as I sat, drawing the strings together, nigh the pedestal of the Goddess of Plenty in the white summer-house, behold, the overgrown yew and privet bushes that had once been clipped in forms of dragon and hippocriff, shrank again to their old preciseness, and the terminal statues rose from the grass, and the wreathed columns bore again their garment of midsummer roses.

I played "The Priest's Pavan" that I had learned from the "Book of Airs," and at the first note the fire-stains on the frontispiece vanished, and one by one the gaping windows donned their lattices, and

the leaden roof shone above the parapet, and the light of a thousand sconces fell about me in broken rillocks of gold.

. . . It was no longer the burr of my viol that rang in my ears, but the chirping of a virginals in music that was conceived by a divinity.

* * * *

One noontide, more than ten years ago, my lord came to the town and found me by the table in my chamber, copying in fair hand the suite of dances that I had made for Daphne's wedding. His tumid red face shone unctuously ; his attire was disordered with the heat.

He flung a parchment book upon the table, and laughed, as he ever laughed, like one drunk with wine.

"T'other morning, when they took up a stone that had cracked in the monk's chapel," said he, "my steward found this in a brazen casket. A set of dances such as are not used nowadays—of music far superior to aught such crickets as you create!"

I could not demur, for my lord was a *cognoscento*,

and although he oft-times affected liking for my work, and professed to find genius therein, I knew that 'twas but humble in his regard. His life had been spent in the great world; players and singers had been damned by his frown. So I took up the book, and opening its pages saw quaintly-shapen notes ranged up and down like little coffins draped in scarlet and black.

"'Tis in lute tabulation," I said. "A book of the airs ecclesiastics loved ere the Reformation brought them low!"

"Ay," commented my lord. "Mayhap the work of the white monk who haunts the precincts o' nights—him, the humble folk call Ambrose. The very sight of that page evokes pictures of woodmen's wives, oddly gowned, hey-trix-come-go-trixing in the cloisters! But farewell to this light talk! Madam, when I put it in her hand (she hath a rage for antiquities), sat her down to the harpsichord, and played things that drove away the scene before our eyes and set us a-wandering in strange places. She fell a-longing, and by her whim all the plans for music at our little mistress's nuptials are changed. That

which you have done shall be brought to light when the lass gives her master a fine boy. Her mother hath sworn to revive all the dances—see, here at the end is the description—and our guests are being taught galliards, lavoltas, pavans . . . What I have come to tell is that nought will content her save that the musicians (receiving their due pay) be disbanded, and that you alone will sit in the gallery and tinkle an ancient virginals from sunset to midnight, whilst we, poor fools! hop and scurry like grigs."

My heart was burdened with disappointment, but I held my peace. Daphne had been my pupil; I had taught her rosy fingers to dash like fire-drakes over the keys, to draw softer notes than the wood-dove's. I had not seen the bridegroom (the match was made at Court), or perchance the excellence of my music might have been marred. As it was, I had thrown into each chord a speech of my devotion to the maid. She had ever known that I regarded her with great tenderness; and being endowed, despite her green youth, with a keener insight than her fellows, had twined wreaths of laurel for my

grey head, and made my chamber ever bright with flowers. The knowledge that he whom her parents had chosen was a man of advanced years and more than evil fame, had distressed me for the while; but the child, from her very innocence, had hitherto displayed no distaste when she spoke of the future.

My lord gave me a folded paper. "Madam hath writ here the order of the dances," he said. "There is but short time for you to study, since, the wedding-day being Thursday, the book must be returned to her on the morrow. "The Priest's Pavan" is the last—'tis the wildest thing in the world—all strutting and curtseying and twisting the arms and pointing downwards with the thumbs! Anan, master fiddler, I must leave you, for my son-in-law waits below, too gouty to climb your stairs. Be sure no harm comes to the book; for, if I may believe madam, it has worth above rubies."

He descended, panting, to his chariot; peering from my casement, I saw, beside the opened panel, the face of the bridegroom, wrinkled, yellow and unholy, with the dull eyes that only sparkle at the sight of the table or of a woman's loveliness His lace cravat

hung beneath his chin like the beard of an African ape. He poked his fingers betwixt my lord's ribs, and cackled foolishly.

"'Tis a wench you keep there!" he cried. "To the deuce with your talk of music-men! A sweet morsel, red and creamy as Temple's nectarines, and with hair soft and light as tow! Send for her down, so that I may look on your choice. A minx, I vow! Madam shall know——"

I heard no more, for the stone-horses leaped forward and the chariot lurched away towards the market-place, where the fresh huckster wenches from the uplands stood beside their stores. When the by-street was quiet again, I passed to my harpsichord, and played the music of the "Book of Airs" from end to end, finding at the very first that a masterpiece of either good or evil genius lay before me on the stand.

. . . Never before had I dreamed of melody so exquisitely pleasurable, so bitterly painful. In each were two things—the flitting of white angels over the lawns of Heaven, and the dancing of fiends around the tormenting fires of Hell. The fragrance

of ever-blooming flowers, and the stench of brimstone hovered about in ghostly clouds. I heard the laughter of pure children, and the cachinnations of imps. Ere long half my chamber was filled with a radiance infinitely brighter than the dying sun's; the other half was lost in impenetrable blackness. My body was sick and trembling; but my spirit was full of eager delight.

At "The Priest's Pavan," I was overcome with frenzy and with ecstasy. This told of the war between Heaven and Hell, of the clashing of archangel's lances—of devils rushing forward and falling back—of breaches made in golden ramparts—of Apollyon leading his myrmidons almost to the battlements. But the voice of God was lifted in thunder; and Hell with its warriors sank seething together through Chaos.

My fingers curled like the talons of a bird; my head sank till my chin lay upon my breast. This was no budget of dances, no toy to please madam the countess withal, but an epic of Divinity. Perchance it had passed from generation to generation of churchmen, as our Bible in later years hath passed

to us. 'Twas music such as is heard at the triumphal feasts of Cherubim.

"I will not play it," I said. "Although I lose my lord's favour, I'll be no party to profanity. 'Tis not meet that such as group about the Court should caper to its passion!"

In the night-time, as I lay sleepless, the parchment shone like touchwood. I rose—hid it in a coffer, yet still I knew of its glittering, and the obsession remained. At dawn I enclosed it in my leatheren wallet, and prepared to start for Woodsetts. But on the threshold I was met by Daphne, hooded so that until she had unknotted the throat-strings none might have known her for the bride.

"The women rose betimes, to gather midsummer dew," she said, "and I stole apart and ran, so that I might bid my master farewell, and tell him how that I shall ever pray for his fame."

The maid was pale as death; her eyes were red with restlessness and weeping. I drew her into the chamber, and there, as she had still the ways of a child, she sat upon my knee, and passed her fingers through my hair and kissed my forehead.

"'Tis a long farewell," she whispered. "Who knows that I may ever return? I have fear at times that my life must shortly reach its term. I would fain have you think of me sometimes."

"I am old and withered, Mistress Daphne," I made answer, "and there is no hope of fame for old men; but as long as I have breath you shall lie in the innermost cabinet."

Big tears rolled down her cheeks. "Ah, master," she sighed, "'tis hard to go away from the folk here to a strange country with one I understand nothing of, and to know that he will be with me always! My mother tells me to have no fear, for my husband will hold me as the apple of his eye. Alack! to be without young playmates!"

She dried her face with her kerchief, and rose; her glance fell on the book in the wallet.

"Will not you play to me of that music?" she said. "To-morrow night all dance to it. We are being instructed in the oddest steps."

I shook my head. "Nay, little one, you must never hear it. This morning I take it back to your

lady mother with word that I cannot follow her behest."

Daphne sank to her knees and clasped my neck. "Then play it to me but once," she pleaded. "I was ever an apt learner, and it may be that I shall understand. When I heard before, out of the harshness came a curious joy; but you will turn each note into a strung jewel."

I gave her no naysay, but moved to the harpsichord and played. And behind me at first I heard a sound of moaning, then of breath leaping after breath; but when I came to "The Priest's Pavan," Daphne was silent as the grave. I turned, to find her standing erect, with rapt countenance, her hands clasped over burgeoning breasts.

A while passed ere she spoke; her voice came low and trembling. "'Tis my desire, master, that you play thus at my nuptials." And she left the chamber with no other word.

So it was that on the appointed night I sat alone in the musicians' gallery of the ball-room at Woodsetts. This place had in long-past times been the refectory of the monks, and the master-builder,

Vignola, had chosen that save for the new floor of oak that swung on iron chains, all should remain unaltered. Behind the tapestries of the Gobelins, which my lord's father had purchased, still might be found dim wall-pictures of Christ at Gethsemane, of the Virgin, and of the Apostles; the light of the candles showed the company from the Court, all bedizened with trinkets and plumes and brocades, moving to and fro in clusters.

Madam came secretly up the narrow staircase, and beckoned me into the shadow, not deeming it fit that the wedding guests should see her converse with one so inferior. The lines of her forehead were eloquent of caprice and satisfaction.

"No chance had I to speak with you before," she said. "The whirl of this merry day hath held me every moment. What think you of the bride—almost a woman now, to-morrow on the way to matronhood?"

Looking down, I saw Daphne, quivering affrightedly, like a white culver amongst ravens. At hand sauntered the groom, simpering, whispering to the men-folk behind screening fingers.

"I know not what to think," I said.

Madam gave no heed. "Impatient for the signal of withdrawal, I protest! See how restlessly she stirs! But, master, what of the music? What of my plan of giving life again to these ancient dances? 'Tis vastly taking. Duchess Mary (she who wears the sombre gown with yellow leaves) declares that her recollection tells that not according to the teachings of the book were galliards and lavoltas danced! They say her age exceeds the century! The beldam dotes; but, even if she be right, why, 'tis a fine thing to dance in styles past human memory. And even if, as she fears, they be enchanted dances, 'tis so much the better. It may be that ghosts will rise!"

Whereat she made her mocking curtsey and withdrew, and anon I began the first air, and the floor swayed under mad caprioles. And in the pause I looked downward again, and saw that each face save Daphne's had grown wan and pregnant with unutterable wickedness. But the maid was blushing, as if the breeze of April clipped her cheeks. She had stolen apart from the rest, and, bride

though she was, all were so intent upon their performance that she passed unobserved.

Methought, as dance followed dance, a thin sulphury vapour rose and wrapped about these revellers, so that their bodies grew vague, and little was to be seen but their lustful blinking eyes . . . Still Daphne stood alone and neglected, toying with the rose at her girdle.

The voice of the virginals swelled so that all other sound was hidden; the mist grew ever thicker and thicker. Ere the playing of "The Priest's Pavan," it seemed as if horny wings had risen from the shoulders of each dancer, and the skin of each had swarthened under the powder.

Then, to the first notes were made the magic twists and down-turnings of the thumbs; and of a sudden, with one accord, the dancers ceased all movement and my hands fell numb; for the tapestry of the eastern wall was drawn aside, and one clothed as a priest in shining vestments entered through an arched doorway, and moved to the place where Daphne waited. A hallowed light emanated from his face and hands, so that none might see;

as he approached the maid, this radiance wound about her in tender embrace. She showed no sign of blanching; but sank before him as the Magdalene sank before Christ. He raised her with infinite gentleness, and put his arm about her waist, and led her to the place whence he had come.

There followed no murmur of anger or surprise; but, as I gazed, smoke and tongues of fire leaped from every crevice of the floor; and, in another minute, there came the noise of iron chains snapping, then, as flames leaped to lick the roof, one hoarse wail of agony.

Young Hamilton.

YOUNG HAMILTON.

ALTHOUGH, with all the English Catholics, the Bamfords, of Linen Dale, had suffered infinite losses during the last hundred years, Madam Bamford still retained some old-fashioned state at Bamford Manor. She was a distant cousin of Margaret Lucas, the fantastical lady, who earned in later days the by-name of "Mad Madge of Newcastle," and she was endowed with as great a pride as was her kinswoman. She was devoid, however, of the literary lady's whimsies; withal she desired—and won by kindly deeds—from the country-folk a considerable amount of respect, that made them overlook the fact of her open devotion to an unpopular creed. It was her belief that the narrowing of one's fortune should not affect either manner or costume; she strove earnestly to rear her daughter, Henrietta—named after the

unfortunate Queen—as if in very truth she was destined to play a part at Court.

She kept no chaplain in the house, where in Elizabeth's time three priests had been haled from a secret chamber under the first landing, and afterwards hanged at Derby. Her devotions were practised in the Eyre's chapel at Hassop, or the Balguys at Rowlee, in the Woodlands. With the vicar of Milton, whose church was visible from her windows, she kept on good terms, welcoming him heartily whenever he brought news of opposition to the Parliament. The Reverend Sherland Adams was no bigot; with him religion was a matter of slight import. He was himself of good Yorkshire family, and the lady always treated him as one of equal position.

“Catholics and Protestants,” he would say sententiously, “all must like chimney-sweepers turn to dust. There has already been question of my turning Non-conformist to save my compounding for my little estate at Woodlathes. A thousand qualms torment me; for I have not two hundred pence in the world. Well enough to say: ‘Be true to the Lord’s

Anointed!' Yet, by the gods, mistress, sooner than lose my land and my livings, I believe that I could swear to the faith of the Mohammedan! An unfrocked parson's pitiable as a plucked gander!"

Madam Bamford only smiled complacently; she knew that, despite his babblings, he was sound at the core, and that he had already impoverished himself for the cause. She was reserved, however, in her confidences, for the man was notoriously indiscreet. Indeed, in after times, his indiscretion gave him a bitter taste of prison-life.

On the afternoon when he came jogging on his fat, white mare with news of the defeat of the Duke of Hamilton with his Scots army, the lady was sitting in the withdrawing-room that opened from the turnpike staircase, stabbing with her needle the fabric stretched upon an embroidery frame, as fiercely as if she were engaged in the destruction of the King's enemies. Henrietta sat near by on a fald-stool, teaching a little spaniel to walk on its hind-legs.

The mother, who was fair and fresh-hued, with jet-black ringlets that fell over a smooth, shapely neck, was gowned according to her wont in *feuille-*

mort silk with yellowed laces ; Henrietta wore azure damask embellished with pink flowers, and a muslin cap that covered her nut-brown hair, and framed quaintly a childish oval face, whose chief beauty was given by the great lustrous violet eyes. The loyal vicar was dwarfish and sallow ; indeed, his skin had never cleared since an attack of jaundice caused by the disastrous defeat at Naseby.

When Madam Bamford rose to receive him, she divined, from the twitching of his lips, that something disastrous had happened. She led him to a chair, and bade Hannah, her favourite woman-servant, who had ushered him to the room, bring wine for his refreshment. Henrietta took the spaniel in her arms, and after a curtsey made towards the door.

“ Nay, child,” he said peevishly ; “ you are surely old enough to suffer with other folk. I come with bad news, mistress—The Duke of Hamilton’s army hath been met at Preston and utterly squandered by the hell-fiend Cromwell. A messenger from Chapel-en-le-Frith declares that Marshal Edward Mathers hath brought prisoners—fifteen hundred or more—

to be kept in the church a while—until 'tis convenient to convey 'em to London. And if all be true, hunger and cramping in that narrow space is killing 'em off in scores. There's a pit opened in a field at the town-end, where they are pitched incontinent, the moment the gaol-fever has done its work!"

Madam Bamford covered her whitened face with her hands. "Enough, sir," she cried. "Tell me no more."

Hannah entered with a silver jug and tankard. Seeing that her mistress was in dire trouble, she flung her apron over head and stumbled from the chamber. She knew from experience that nought trivial would ever bring tears to Madam Bamford's eyes. Parson Sherland Adams tilted the jug with trembling fingers, until the red wine ran over the brim of the tankard. Then he rose, and with his right hand held high above his head cried: "God save the King, and Satan grip those who would tear him from the throne!"

Madam Bamford's lips moved, but not in response; she had begun to count her beads. Henrietta did not display as overwhelming a grief (she was only

fourteen years old), but her colour had faded and her eyes were brighter than ever.

"If they be starved and ill, sir," she said earnestly, "why, surely we can give them food and doctoring?"

"Ay," replied Adams, with a husky laugh; "we might offer food, but it would ne'er reach 'em, and our reward would be a riddling through with Round-head bullets!"

As he spoke, a heavy rustle of satin sounded in the doorway, and Priscilla Bradshaw, of Nether Lees Hall, sister-in-law to one who four months later played the odious part of regicide, sailed lightly into the chamber. She had ridden over to break the news of defeat to her Catholic neighbour. Unknown to the world in general, the sympathies of this pretty Puritan were all on the King's side; and notwithstanding the difference of religion, there was warm friendship between the two ladies.

"Our good pastor here!" she cried, uplifting her palms. "Dear Frances, I am spared the telling of ill news; for I see 'tis already done. But, prythee, don't lose heart. I'll not let my spirits flag—maybe

in another year England will be her own self once more."

Madam Bamford kissed her neighbour's soft cheek. Priscilla came of the Cavedale branch of the Rowlands—a family as loyal as any in the kingdom; but her husband had been perverted by his brother's counsels, and now played the part of lukewarm Roundhead. He was tolerant enough of his wife's opinions; for theirs had been a true-love match, and she was very comely.

The parson refilled the tankard, drained it, and rose to take leave. The wine had reached his head; he began to sing in a thin, shrill voice a newly-written ballad :

“ Though for a time you may see Whitehall,
With cobwebs hanging on the wall,
Instead of silk, and silver brave
As formerly it used to have;
In every room, the sweet perfume,
Delightful for that princely train;
The which you shall see, when the time it shall be
That the King enjoys his own again.”

“ Fare you well, ladies, fare you well. I gave tithe of lead to the King against the Parliament; I delivered muskets to three men against the Parlia-

ment ; I sent five fat oxen to the Earl of Newcastle, as a free gift to maintain the war ! ”

Priscilla Bradshaw laid a hand upon his arm. “ And because you have done all these things,” she said ; “ be careful of your tongue, good Master Adams, lest you be seized, stripped of everything, and cast into prison ! ”

“ Eheu ! ” he groaned, as he felt his way down the circular staircase. “ Eheu ! sooner than lose my livings, I ’d swear a black cow white ! ”

When he was gone, Mistress Bradshaw bent to examine Madam Bamford’s needlework. A large piece of white silk was strung upon the frame ; the design was outlined in gold thread. The colours were bright green and scarlet and yellow ; already one figure was finished—a king straying in a garden full of fountains and flowers—a king crowned, and attired in cloth of gold. Madam Bamford was famed for her skill with the needle, and many of her pictures had been copied by the Peakland ladies ; but of a truth this must not be exposed to the vulgar eye.

“ ‘Tis vastly fine,” said Priscilla Bradshaw ; “ but,

in sober earnest, were I you I would work it in the privacy of my bedchamber—not here, where all who care may look on't. Believe me officious in giving you advice, but only do as I wish. This last failure of the King's friends means more bitter things than I dare imagine; to show sympathy now with his Majesty'll bring hornets about your head!"

Madam Bamford caressed her friend's hand. "Priscilla," she replied, "were they to take all I had, 'twould not affect my loyalty. I shall stitch until king and queen, princes and princesses are all depicted. What matters it—Cromwell's tools can only filch my dowry—the land's Henrietta's, and she's too young to rouse their malice."

She called for fresh wine; Mistress Bradshaw emptied a Venetian glass cup without any finical demur.

"As I rode through Milton," she remarked, when she had dried her lips, "I saw all the village folk flocked together at the Nether End, and I called to one—Goody Furness, of the 'Bull's Head'—to ask the wherefore of the crowd. The crone was jubilant. 'We're off to Briggate Clough,' says she

in her rough jargon, ‘to fetch aar kine whòameward. E’er sin’ noon ha’ we been halin’ up clocks an’ pewter an’ haase-plenishin’ fro th’ mine-shafts. An’ at neeghtfall we make merry.’ ”

The Puritan lady was an excellent mimic; one saw a beldam, humpbacked, wrinkled, toothless, half-suspicious of her questioner’s good faith.

“‘Tis gran’ gettin’ my feyther’s armchair i’ th’ haase-place again,’ ” she adds with an afterthought; “‘an’ naa I’ll be off to church, dressèd as a Kirstian ooman should be. Domn ’em as onsattle th’ Peak, be they for King or for Crum’ll! ’ ”

Madam Bamford gathered together her skeins and needles and replaced them in the huswife. “Heigho!” she sighed. “Once on a time these folk were the most loyal in the country; now they care for nought save their own ease of mind. Yet, who can blame them—they know naught of our King—they ne’er saw him—they’ve scarce heard of him! Poor souls, ‘tis peace they crave for—peace—peace with shame, so long as ‘tis peace.”

Priscilla Bradshaw drew on her riding gloves. “Since I’m free to do as I please, my husband being

in Derby," she said, "I'm of a mind to ride to Brigate, and watch these joskins gathering together their herds. Lord! how they'll caper! Will not you come with me, Frances; I promise you a scene worthy of a comedy?"

Madam Bamford shook her head. "My heart's too heavy," she replied. "I'm more in the vein for kneeling than for laughing. But, Henrietta—'tis as well she should see these things—there's little enough mirth for my daughter nowadays."

The girl's pretty face was flushed. "Dear mother, let me go!" she cried. "All has been so unhappy of late—'twill be cheering to watch the humours of these good folk as they drive their cows and calves homeward. And I've ne'er seen the Clough used as a hiding-place. . . . I promise you that I'll do nought foolish—nought that you'd wish me to avoid."

Her mother smiled through the tears that were gathering again. "If Mistress Bradshaw'll take you," she said, "I've not a word to say against your going. But be sure to come home before nightfall, for there's no safety in these troubrous times."

Henrietta went away to don her riding-skirt and order the saddling of her mare. When the two ladies were alone they said nought, but wept together in silence.

* * * * *

Briggate Clough lies north of Milton, in the heart of the moor. From the summit of the hill known as Lord's Seat, a concave slides into a deep and gloomy ravine, the limestone crags on either side well-nigh meeting overhead. A rough bridle-track descends through this until it terminates in a deep depression of the earth's surface, with precipitous walls and no other outlet save for the foolhardy. This place had been used by many generations of Milton folk as a safe fastness for their cattle when there was fighting in the neighbourhood. The benty grass was supplemented with trusses of old hay, and pure water issued from a crevice at the foot of a great rock.

The distance from Linen Dale was greater than Mistress Bradshaw had believed; as she and Henrietta reached the narrowest part of the ravine, they

were met by a herd of cattle, rushing madly along, in exuberant spirits because the time of durance was over. The horses backed carefully behind a projecting rock, and when the last beast had passed, an elderly farmer, with a merry, wrinkled face, paused beside Henrietta and doffed his battered hat respectfully.

"These be th' very last," he said. "T'others were drove to Milton an' haair sin'. There's none a soul left i' th' spot. An', beggin' yor favour, Mistress Bradshaw, there's been a sarvant-man a-seekin' yo' wi' word as some o' th' gentlemen who browt th' Scots prisoners from Preston ha' come to sup wi' yo'. Master Bradshaw's gotten whòame, an' he jealousied yo' were here."

The Puritan lady thanked him gracefully; but when he had passed on, she pouted with annoyance. "I'm sorry, child," she said; "but the stars are against us. All that I can do is to ride back forthright. But the stir is over now—there's nought to cheer one. Come, let's turn, my pretty."

Henrietta was gazing towards the clough. The vapours were rising from the marshy ground; gusts

of hot air, heavy with the odours of the cattle that had rested there for the last month, pulsed up the ravine.

"Pray, Mistress Bradshaw," she said earnestly, "do not trouble about me. I can easily reach home before darkness comes. Moreover, since I have come so far, I must take one look at this strange place."

A pair of weasels crept sinuously across the bridle-path. Mistress Bradshaw in her excitement and terror forbore to urge Henrietta's immediate return, and ere she could command her voice, the girl had ridden almost out of earshot. She succeeded at last in attracting her attention; but Henrietta only smiled and shook her head; so, very unwillingly, she turned her mare's head in the direction of Lord's Seat, devoutly hoping that the hoyden would content herself with one brief glimpse, and overtake her before she had reached the boundary of the moor.

Meanwhile Henrietta rode to and fro over the trampled grass. The clough was absolutely silent now, save for the chirps of the dabchicks that ran beside the spring, and the invisible snipe that swayed

overhead in the half-light, bleating like lost lambs. The weird solitude soon became unendurable ; she turned towards the ravine, reining at its entrance for a last look.

A sharp cry broke from her lips ; for at the entrance of a low artificial cavern that led to a disused mine she saw a lad's face, wan and blood-stained, intently watching her movements. Her first impulse was to ride away as speedily as she could ; but being courageous by nature, she gave no sign of fear as the stranger slowly and painfully crept from the darkness.

He was outlandishly dressed in tartan, covered with dust and mud. A great basket-hilted sword swung at his left side ; a silver bugle, all battered, was fastened to his belt ; the plaid hanging over his shoulder was brown and sodden. He was tall, well-made ; little yellow curls all moist with sweat lay close upon his forehead. Henrietta's breath came quickly as she noted his lameness and the ghastliness of his countenance. Within an arm's-length of the girl he bent his bare knee in salutation, suppressing a moan of pain.

"Can you help me, mistress?" he muttered. "A Scot who hath fought for the King?"

She glanced around fearfully; the edge-o'-dark was falling betimes; there was no spying villager.

"Ay," she said in a low voice. "I can and I will. How came you here?"

"I stole from the church where our men are rotting," he said hurriedly; "burst open a window—crawled out in the darkness. A sentry fired, pierced my shoulder; I was lamed before, but I crept through the woodland, knowing naught of the country, and at dawn found myself here. All day have I lain in hiding—fearing every moment that someone would enter yon wet cave. My hand hath gripped the hilt of my Ferrara until now."

He sank wearily to a tussock of rushes; Henrietta dismounted and stood at his side.

"Trust me to do all I can," she said. "You are hurt, and my mother's house lies six miles away. Let us wait until night falls; go back to the cave—I'll lead my horse there. . . . You are not too ill to ride?"

"Not I," he replied; "but you cannot walk. There's nought for't but capture."

Henrietta took his hand. "Come, sir," she said, "I'm not afraid. If we reach Linen Dale, my mother'll give you a safe lodging. We are loyal folk, and the Mother of God will help us."

In the cave, after she had tied her mare's bridle to a rusty stanchion in the wall, she made the wounded lad rest beside her on a stone slab. He was so outdone that he could not sit upright; she bade him lie and rest his head in her lap. He talked incoherently for a while; then his eyes closed heavily, and he lay motionless until the young moon rose gently over the edge of the clough, and Henrietta aroused him with a light touch.

"We must go," she whispered. "The moor will be deserted now; all the villagers are merry-making for the victory. For once you shall ride a woman's saddle."

She would listen to no naysay; but bringing her mare to the stone, helped him to mount, then led the way slowly up the ravine. To her excited imagination the strait passage seemed now full of

preternatural life; a loathsome bat fluttering by struck her ringlets with his leathern wing; the hooting of owls made her heart well-nigh burst with wild leaping. She gave thanks silently when they reached the moor, where were neither rocks nor trees to cast fearsome shadows.

The knowledge of her responsibility sharpened her wits; instead of following the path she chose to cross the heather, stumbling on recklessly over the broken ground. The Scot was silent; he crouched like an old man on the saddle, his head drooping on his sound shoulder. More than once she was overcome with dread that he was losing consciousness; but each time she spoke, a flickering smile, dimmed with bodily and mental pain, brought reassurance. The fear of discovery left her when Linen Dale was reached, and they passed boldly along the winding avenue that led to the Manor.

Madam Bamford was waiting anxiously near the fore-court gate. Henrietta dropped the bridle and ran forward.

“Mother,” she said, “I’ve brought home to you one who hath fought for the King!”

The reproof Madam Bamford had ready, for the uneasiness caused by her daughter's long absence, was never uttered. The young man slid from the saddle, gasped, stumbled forward, and would have fallen had not she caught him in her arms.

"'Tis a swound," she said. "Help me, child, we must carry him indoors. Ah! there's fresh blood upon him!"

As they staggered under his weight (he was stalwart and tall), his senses returned, and he began to struggle.

"Dear lady," he said indignantly, between his teeth. "I'm no infant—prythee let me feel my feet. I can walk readily enough."

But she said nought until they had laid him in her own bed, unmindful of the stains he made on the snowy sheets. Then she bade Henrietta bring old Hannah, but on no account speak of the guest to any other house-servant.

The girl sat outside the chamber door, listening with sharpened ears to the footsteps that moved around the bed. Once or twice her mother passed with cordials and medicines from the still-room; but

the lady did not chide her for her vigil. An hour before sunrise, however, just as her eyes were closing, Madam Bamford came out on tip-toe, and putting an arm around her waist, raised her to her feet.

"I am proud of my daughter," she whispered. "Now, to your bed. Ay, he'll live, though at first I had doubts. He sleeps now—he's as weak as a bantling. A near kinsman of the Duke of Hamilton, poor lad! Hannah'll bide with him for the present. . . . You and I must lie together, then take our turn at nursing."

* * * * *

For the next few days Madam Bamford trembled with apprehension lest the presence of the Scot should be suspected, and her house be searched. Rumours had spread of divers escapes from the church of Chapel-en-le-Frith. The Reverend Sherland Adams came daily to the Manor with stories of how the gaol-fever was increasing amongst the prisoners. Once he rode over to the little town, and was given by Marshal Edward Mathews, the officer who had conducted them thither, a glimpse of a closely-packed crowd.

“ ‘Twas like a hideous dream,” said the parson. “ A foul, hot steam rising to the rafters, veiling ghostly faces bound with clouts. The stronger men are grimly silent, the ailing rend the air with bitter cries. I confess that I turned sick—had much ado to drag myself from the porchway. They told me that several had gotten free—one, a brave lad of family, they’re eager to find.”

The lady did not tell him her secret. Although she believed firmly in his loyalty, she had determined that if trouble ever came of her righteous hospitality, she alone must pay the penalty. Besides, from the very first she had felt an odd, motherly liking for the stranger, and she was jealous of any other, save the old woman-servant and Henrietta, sharing her anxious labour. Mr. Hamilton was now in high fever; but she had no doubt of his ultimate recovery. His fond, incoherent talk of a happy home-life, of a mother and sister in an ancient castle, moved her often to tears. It was undesirable for him ever to be left alone, lest in moving he should displace his bandages; at stated times Henrietta herself watched at the bedside, moistening his lips with an

essence of medicinal herbs, whilst her mother and Hannah snatched a few hours' sleep. A curious gravity settled upon the girl's countenance; she eyed the man she had succoured with the same perplexed wonder that a young wife displays for her ailing first-born. Apart from the interest of his having fought for the King, and come of a faithful and noble stock, he was exceedingly handsome. The soft golden beard that budded now upon his chin seemed to her like the breast plumage of a marvellous bird called the Phœnix, whose history she had read in a black-letter book. In his gentle delirium his eyes sparkled with a tender brilliance. Henrietta discovered a means of quelling his mental agitation—a continuous stroking of his forehead with her hand. She was coy enough, however, not to practise this in her mother's presence.

As his recovery progressed, Madam Bamford began to wonder how his escape from the country might be effected. The only person of influence abroad to whom she could appeal was her cousin Margaret, who three years ago had wedded at Paris the Marquis of Newcastle. She and her husband lived now

at Rotterdam, keeping open house for the entertainment of all exiled Royalists.

A certain reluctance to broach the subject of his departure kept her lips sealed. Hamilton, growing weary of the confinement, devised plans of returning to his own country in the disguise of a chapman; but his hostess, knowing that suspicion was alert everywhere, gave him no encouragement. As time passed, and he was able to walk unaided about the chamber, her vigilance relaxed in some measure; and, one bleak afternoon at the end of November, when she was convinced that no visitor would approach the house, she was weak enough to give him permission to sit in her withdrawing-room.

An overhauling of her deceased husband's wardrobe had produced the sober costume of an English country gentleman. Hamilton, deprived of his tartan, presented as admirable a figure in russet cloth with gold buttons and black silk stockings. A larger fire than usual burned between the andirons; Madam Bamford compelled him to sit in the deep-lugged hearth-chair, hitherto sacred to the gaffers of the family. Henrietta chose a spinning-stool at his side;

on her knees lay a dulcimer; ever and anon she touched the keys with a little ivory hammer.

Madam Bamford suddenly remembered that he had confessed to playing the viol-de-gamba. Her husband had been an expert musician; she went to find his favourite instrument. And Henrietta, looking up at Hamilton, saw that he was watching her with such a strange intentness that she became confused, and let the dulcimer fall clanging to the floor.

"Why, mistress," he said, with a mirthful laugh, "cannot you endure an admirer's gaze? I was but thinking how vastly I am indebted to you—how, had it not been for you and your wonderful courage, I had been food for crows long ago. Believe me, though madam your mother hath fears for my safety, I must go very soon, now that I am strong; but I cannot go without telling you that I am your slave."

To his consternation the girl fell a-weeping violently. "Nay—you must not—you shall not speak of going yet!" she sobbed. "Sure Cromwell's soldiers'll kill you, and our hearts'll break clean asunder!"

He was only a lad, and very tender with woman-

kind ; he sank to his knees and drew her hands away from her face. "My dearie," he murmured, "I cannot live upon you much longer—'twould make me ashamed. But when there's peace in the land, and such as I are no longer outlawed—why—may I not come back to you?"

Henrietta was smiling through her tears ; she lifted her hands to his chin, making a soft nest with her palms. "Ay, that you may," she said ; "after you're gone, I'll count the days."

The young beauty was so tempting that Hamilton lost command of himself, and bending forward suddenly, kissed her on the lips. And at that very moment a familiar rustling of satins sounded in the doorway, and Mistress Priscilla Bradshaw entered.

"Lord!" she cried. "I ask your pardon, young people! When I stole up the staircase, I had no notion of marring a love-scene!" Then she gazed curiously at the youth, and her face turned very pale. "A King's man and a Scot!"

Madam Bamford came now with the viol. She had no fears of Priscilla turning informer ; in fact,

she found some relief in the thought of winning an influential ally.

“ ‘Tis Mr. James Hamilton, the Duke’s nephew,” she said. “ Henrietta brought him here the evening you took her to Briggate Clough. I expected no visitor, or he’d not have been in sight.”

“ Hist!” said Mistress Bradshaw excitedly; “ tell me nought—’tis best I should be ignorant. Though the weather’s so bitter, I’ve come a-borrowing. My sister L’Estrange, of Cley-next-the-Sea, is nigh to her first lying-in—and my husband’s away from home—and Arbell sends a luckless serving-man with a letter declaring she’ll die unless I’m with her for her time of trial. We are twins, you bear in mind, and the only offspring of our parents, and there’s naught I can do but start at once. The man’s been thrown and hurt—I’m half-afraid he cannot return with me, and I shall have a squire to seek. But my errand was to borrow your pillion (mine’s been lent for the last month), so that I may start at day-break.”

Madam Bamford drew her aside. “ All that I have is yours, Priscilla,” she said. “ Come, let us go to-

gether to the harness-room—I'd fain have a private talk."

As they descended the stairs, Hamilton took up the viol-de-gamba, and began to play; but soon laid it aside and knelt again beside Henrietta's stool.

"Little mistress," he said, "I have but a poor return to offer you for saving my life, but, when the King sits on the throne again, I'll be fain to beg your acceptance of a home in the North. To-day I must e'en content myself with laying at your feet a heart that no other maid hath ever stirred."

A vivid colour rose to Henrietta's cheeks. "Mr. Hamilton," she said gently; "if you do not forget me, you will find me waiting."

So they talked until darkness fell, and Madam Bamford came in, soon after old Hannah had lighted the candles. In her hand she held a sealed paper.

"'Tis good to have such a friend as Mistress Bradshaw," she said. "To-morrow, ere dawn, you will ride with her, as her sister's serving-man, to Cley-next-the-Sea. Pride must abide, says the proverb. The fellow who brought her sister's message will alight at the park-gate here, and bide with us till

he's strong, whilst you take his place. Mistress Bradshaw makes no doubt of reaching the place safely in three days, and there lives near the harbour one of Newcastle's Whitecoats, in whose brig you shall sail to Rotterdam. I have money for his fee, and here's a letter for my cousin. You may trust my lord and her to welcome you open-armed——”

She stopped abruptly, seeing that Henrietta was toying with a heavy ring that had been placed on her thumb. She recognised it as one he had always worn.

Hamilton stood before her, with bowed head. “I have to crave a greater generosity,” he said. “When the King’s enemies are overcome, I mean to entreat you for your daughter’s hand. We are of the same faith and devoted to the same cause. It may be years, but, trust me, madam, my love of her will only increase with time.”

The mother’s eyes were flooded. “The child comes of a constant race,” she replied. “No man disloyal to the Crown should win her. My thoughts and prayers go with you.”

The Country Wedding.

THE COUNTRY WEDDING.

ON Cousin Anne Bagshawe's wedding-day, Charlotte Goodwin set out without escort on the three miles' walk to Grassbrook church. A certain diffidence because of her unattended condition made her choose roundabout paths that crossed fields and woodland, rather than submit herself to the sly questions of such acquaintance as she would certainly meet on the high road. William Askew, to whom she was engaged, had declared that he could not accompany her—he wished to take a load of turnips to market that morning, and not even sentimental considerations would make him neglect the routine of business. Later, ere the feasting at the Bagshawes' house had begun, he promised that she would certainly see him. Charlotte was of too sweet a nature to show pique; but ever since she had known of his plan she had been conscious of an odd depression.

The idea that the fellow preferred selling his turnips to being in her company gave her some slight dread of the future; if his behaviour were indifferent to-day, what would it be after she had left Crosslowe to keep house for him at Beeley Folds?

Although it was so early in the year—St. Valentine's day had fallen on the preceding Saturday—the weather was fair and warm—the strong breeze that swept from the western moorland being tempered by a glowing sun. Most of the farmers had turned out their kine to savour the growing grass, already bright green as if spring had come in very truth. The honeysuckle that wound about the hedge-rows was almost in full leaf; the dog-mercury stood ankle-high.

Charlotte wore a new gown for Cousin Anne Bagshawe's wedding. On her last visit to Calton St. Anne's, a month before, she had bought a paper pattern of the latest mode, and had for the first fortnight spent many anxious hours of study concerning the fitting of the waist and skirt. The material was thin silk—"China silk"—the ground white, with a queer pattern of little green sprigs.

Aunt Charlotte, her godmother (who died two years ago, on the eve of Milton Wakes), had preserved this for at least forty years, and had presented it to Charlotte only when at her last gasp. The gown was quaintly and clumsily fashioned; but it could not hide the beauty of the girl's young figure. Her hat, too, was extraordinary—a shallow thing, covered with pleated tulle and embellished with a wreath of hop leaves and flowers. She wore white silk gloves on her little hands; she was shod with bronzed leather, far too flimsy for the walk; and, being certain that no rain would fall, she carried no umbrella, but only a faded red watered-silk parasol with a jointed stick, that folded until it resembled a fan.

Old Keziah, who kept house at Crosslowe—she had served the Goodwins for half a century, and yet was hale as a woman in her prime—came with her to the garden gate. Now and then, being fiercely observant of any slight upon the only creature she loved—she tossed a defiant grey head. Askew's breach of courtship-etiquette irritated her almost beyond endurance. "The consated fool!" she said, under her breath. "Him to be so sure o' her,

when he's none good enow to lig under her feet!
By'r Leddy, hoo'll be th' loveliest wench i' th' church
—or for that matter, wi'in a twenty-mile march. Bu'
th' lads abaat here mit be blind!"

At parting she slipped an envelope stuffed with rice in Charlotte's skirt pocket. "'Tis best to keep up wi' owd customs," she observed. "Naa, I do hope as you'll enjoy yoursen at th' merry-make—an' daunce till shoe-sole an' stockin'-sole are both worn through!" Then Charlotte, laughing faintly, passed down the rough lane, and turned at the first stile to wave her hand. She saw then that Keziah was wiping her eyes with a corner of her apron. "Well," she said, "I do believe she's more put about than I am at me having to walk alone! A good, kind soul is Keziah!"

Her way led across grass-fields, ploughed fields (where, fortunately, other feet had padded the lately made furrows), down cloughs whose little streams were bridged with mossy flags, through a wood of poor timber known as Wranglands, across the "leppings" of the Dale-brook, then climbed the hill-side to Spitewinter Farm, and having passed

through the stackyard reached the Grassbrook highway, half a mile short of the church. A party of Milton folk—three young courting couples—went by without seeing her; she waited until they had passed out of sight beyond Grassbrook Pinfold; then she climbed the wooden stile and followed slowly, after looking at the big gold watch that had belonged to her father, and seeing that there was still twenty minutes before the time appointed for the ceremony.

But before she had walked more than fifty yards on the rough stone path that ran alongside the road, she slipped slightly, and afterwards hearing an ominous clicking she found that the high wooden heel of her right shoe had loosened, and threatened with every step to come off altogether. As she could do nothing to prevent this, she walked on very delicately, scarce lifting her feet from the ground, until—just as she came in sight of the shingled spire—the heel, entangling itself in a loop of dead bramble, separated suddenly from the sole, and the heads of the tiny nails pricked her skin.

There was nothing now but to wait for the next

farmer's trap, and ask for a lift as far as the lich-gate. She stood looking ruefully at the scratched bronzed heel; but for propriety's sake she would have taken off both shoes and walked easily. At last came the sound of wheels—a smart dogcart, with a slender bay between the shafts approached rapidly. The occupant was young, dark, not unhandsome, with brown eyes and hair. He wore the clothes of a gentleman-farmer; a cluster of snowdrops in his button-hole showed that he too was a wedding-guest.

Charlotte turned, to make a valiant pretence of walking; but the man reined his horse, and lifted his hat courteously. "I see that you have had an accident," he said, pointing at the heel with his whip. "Please do me the favour of driving with me to the church."

She did not demur; but gave him her hand and mounted to his side. "You are good to ask me," she said. "I was feeling very foolish—I'd no mind to walk lamely."

He took the heel, in spite of a little protest, and put it in his pocket. "When we reach the church,"

he said, "I'll help you to your place, and then you shall give me your shoe—there's sure to be some cobbler near—he can mend it in a moment—and we'll arrange so that nobody'll know."

Charlotte smiled—her lips parted for a glimpse of beautiful white teeth. "I shall be very grateful," she said. "It's a punishment to my vanity—I ought not to have come in such flimsy things. But I've never been to a wedding before, and I was vain enough to want to make an—an elegant appearance."

They had reached the lich-gate now; in groups along the pathway stood the village folk, old and young. Before he alighted he bent towards her. "You'll take my arm and lean as heavily as you like," he said, "and we'll walk as if we were old friends. I promise you that the people won't see."

She nodded reply; her colour rose charmingly. She found it somewhat difficult to walk quite upright, nevertheless she did it gracefully, although near the porch, where a lout covered them with rice, she almost stumbled. He took her to a pew near the rood-screen; then asked for her shoe and went away

to "put up" his horse. In the churchyard he inquired the whereabouts of the cobbler's shop; the lad whom he addressed pointed to a gaffer who sat on the steps of the old cross. He beckoned to this fellow to follow him out of sight, then showed him the shoe. "If you can set this right in five minutes, and bring it to me at 'The Peacock,'" he said, "I'll give you half-a-sovereign."

The old man gaped, then, hiding the shoe under his coat, scuttled away like a hare. In less time than the gentleman had expected, he brought it, the heel securely fastened, and received the astounding remuneration. Then Charlotte's new friend returned to the church, which was already filling, and made his way to her side.

"It is here," he said. "May I put it on for you?" But Charlotte shook her head, and, dropping the shoe, slipped it gently on her foot. He elbowed a prayer-book from the shelf, and stooped. "At least I shall fasten it," he whispered; and before Charlotte could protest the thing was done.

The vicar, an elderly man, poor, pallid, and a Ritualist, entered, stood in reverence before the altar,

crossed himself, then flicked the brass flower-vases and candlesticks with a feather-brush. The bridegroom, a tall young farmer, and his best man made their way to the choir-stalls, and sat down, talking in undertones. Somewhere near the door three children in arms began to howl, each being apparently desirous of excelling the others.

Charlotte's companion turned towards her again. "Tell me who everybody is?" he said. "It is almost my first visit to Grassbrook, and all are strangers."

She directed his eyes with her own, and murmured names of uncles and aunts and cousins, and of folk without connection with the Bagshawe family. "But I have seen very little of them," she added, "I'm almost a stranger myself. It was kind of Cousin Anne to ask me, though—I felt very pleased that I was not altogether forgotten."

The heads of the congregation turned porchwards now, to view the entry of the bride and her father. She was short and plump and high-coloured. She wore white silk with orange blossoms; a veil of tulle covered her from head to foot. The father was big and pursy; in his left hand he carried a quaint

beaver hat. The two bridesmaids wore bright blue—they were sisters of the bridegroom—handsome girls, who carried themselves with the composed dignity of those familiar with the duties of their office.

The service began, the vicar reading in a voice that soared and sank, now unduly emphasising, again whispering inaudibly. Charlotte's new acquaintance saw that she paid but little attention, her gaze wandering from one to another guest. She seemed relieved when all was over and, save for the intimates who flocked to the vestry, the congregation moved to the churchyard and lined the pathway.

"I have never been to a wedding before," said Charlotte, in a low voice. "I thought everything would be so different—it was grey—everything seemed so colourless."

The man laughed. "The church itself is depressing," he said. "There was dust everywhere, except where there was mould. Yet if old sayings are worth anything the couple'll be happy, for the sun shines brightly."

An elderly woman, lean and small-eyed—the

hostess of "The Peacock"—stood near by; she was whispering to a neighbour-gossip. Both could hear every word.

"'Tis Mr. Wyllard, Lord Bransby's new agent—a sort o' cousin to his lordship. I heard as William Bagshawe invited him to Anne's wedding—Lord Bransby being the landlord, and Calton Flat one o' the biggest farms. The wench is Charlotte Goodwin—Goodwin the tanner's dowter—related to the Bagshawe's on the mother's side. An orphan, poor dear."

Wyllard turned to Charlotte. "This must be our introduction," he said. "I am glad, Miss Goodwin, that we know each other's name. See, here comes the wedding-party."

Bride and groom hurried from the porch, their heads bent for the shower of rice. Charlotte opened her envelope and scattered the contents. A hired landau waited at the gate. The village lads held a rope across the road, in accordance with the old Grassbrook custom, until the groom gave his offering of silver. A party of six entered the vehicle—somebody shouted "Hip-hip-hurrah!" and the two

restive white horses drew all away for a drive round the parish.

Most of the spectators made their way now to "The Peacock"; but those who were invited to the feasting gathered together near the northern wicket of the churchyard. There Charlotte was spoken to for the first time by her kinsfolk. They welcomed her warmly; the women embracing her in the good old country fashion, the men smiling broadly and squeezing her hand. Mr. Wyllard was greeted with the respect properly shown to one whom it is an honour to entertain. Then the company separated in couples, and went up the hillside arm in arm.

Wyllard stopped ever and anon to look at the view, with the result that he and Charlotte were soon left behind. She removed her hand from his arm—he drew it back again. "It's the custom," he said, with a smile, "and we must abide by it."

Some of the others looked back; Charlotte knew that they were commenting upon her behaviour. "Let us hurry," she said. "It is not the custom to lag as we are doing."

"Nay," said Wyllard, "remember that I am a

stranger here—that I've only the slightest acquaintance with anybody. Believe that I'm grateful." He stopped again. "In what direction does your home lie?" he asked.

She pointed to the distant village lying beside the moor. "Crosslowe is the house, amongst the beech-trees—yonder on the hill behind the church—we can just see the chimneys."

They loitered on past yellow-washed thatched cottages, where women stood in the gardens to watch the passing guests. Wyllard heard more questions concerning his and Charlotte's identity. "For sure they're none livin' i' this country," said one. "Man an' wife, I mak' no doubt!"

At last they passed through the open gateway of the farm and reached the yard, which was full of dogcarts and traps. Aunt Bagshawe stood at the front door to receive her guests—a fair-skinned, buxom woman, gowned in purple satin. She had not been to church, since at home there were a thousand things to overlook. She had hair the same colour as Charlotte's—coppery brown and very luxuriant. The family resemblance went no further; her eyes

were shrewd and narrow, and her lower jaw was undershot. She curtsied to Wyllard, and spoke of the favour of his company; then, after a hearty kiss sent Charlotte to the chamber—first door on the left—where the women doffed their hats.

Wyllard was taken to the best parlour, where already several of the older men sat drinking whiskey and water. These, being farmers of some standing, were regarded as “the better end of folk,” and therefore kept separate from the company of less degree. Only one lady was there—a vivacious creature with prominent irregular teeth—the wife of a landowner, who, because of his four hundred acres, looked upon himself and spoke of himself as the “Squire of Grassbrook.” To keep the others in countenance, as she said, she was sipping sherry. Wyllard had met her once before, at Calton St Anne’s Agricultural Show; she greeted him cordially, as a friend of long standing.

“Very pleased to see you here, Mr. Wyllard,” she said. “I was not at church—we drove straight here in the brougham—Mr. Ranger was afraid of the mare taking cold if we waited for the service. And so you

came up with Miss Goodwin—yes, I saw you through the window. A beautiful girl, isn't she?—if she lived anywhere but in this country the people'd go mad about her. You see, Mr. Wyllard, I was brought up in London, so I know." She lowered her voice. "It's a pity that she's engaged—to William Askew—perhaps you know him? A bumpkin, if ever there was one. I suppose he wasn't at the wedding, or he'd have walked with her from the church."

She rattled on, shrewdly interested in his change of expression. Until this moment he had not imagined that the beautiful Charlotte had a lover—her face had spoken frankly of innocence and sweet simplicity—her eyes were the eyes of one yet ignorant of passion. The Squire's wife, finding at last that his attention had wandered, turned to her husband, a wizened old man, and asked sharply why Askew was not present.

"I reckon he's gone to market," was the reply. "Mr. Bagshawe should have chosen another day. William Askew's none of those who let a chance go by."

Then the Squire drew near to Wyllard on the sofa, and, laying a hand upon his knee, asked divers questions concerning my lord's movements, and proffered the letting of his shooting for the next season.

Aunt Bagshawe came in again, to urge all to drink. To Wyllard she whispered : " Happen you'd like to see the presents, sir ? Please to come this way—they're all spread out i' th' green parlour. I'm sure we're very grateful indeed for the fine set o' knives you sent. Anne's been very fortunate, what with cheques and handsome remembrances—things were vastly different when I got wed."

He followed to the hall, where a woman-servant met her with an urgent summons to the kitchen. She opened the door of another room, where the girls chattered in groups. Charlotte stood neglected by the window ; her aunt beckoned with a red forefinger.

" Come you and show Mr. Wyllard the presents," she said. " I've gotten to see after the roasting."

Charlotte led the way to the green parlour, so called because many years ago the oaken panelling had been covered with dull paint. Nobody was

there ; Wyllard, displaying no interest in the treasures of the young couple, made her sit in a chair by the fire. He saw that her colour had risen—that the silk over her bosom rose and fell quickly.

" You are not enjoying yourself," he said, " you seem dull ? "

She nodded. " I am such a stranger," she said. " Although these are my own folk, I scarce know anybody. I never knew why, but whilst my father lived we never met."

Wyllard's gaze was fixed upon her face. " 'Twould have been more cheerful for you if Mr. William Askew —Mrs. Ranger told me of him—were here."

The blush faded ; she raised her eyes slowly to meet his. " I don't think," she said slowly, " I don't think that it would make any difference."

Some one in the parlour whence Wyllard had come began to sing, to the music of a worn piano, half of whose notes were dumb. The song was " The Wolf," the man's voice was powerful and sweet. Unluckily, however, he showed an absolute disregard of the aspirate. Charlotte rose from her chair. " It's Mr. Enos Green," she said, " he's a professional—my

aunt told me that he was engaged to come. His father's Green, the cattle-dealer—he's spent hundreds of pounds on Enos's musical education."

Wyllard was about to beg her to remain where she was, when the door opened and Aunt Bagshawe entered. "I was wondering, Mr. Wyllard," said she, "if you could honour us with playing, 'Come Haste to the Wedding ?' 'Twas played when Mr. Bagshawe and I were wed—old Simon Wain, the fiddler, played it. The gentleman we've hired for the music doesn't know the tune."

He agreed and followed her to the piano, on which, in spite of all difficulties, he played the tune very creditably. When it was known that Wyllard, the man of family, played, all flocked into the room. Squire Ranger chirped in now and then with fragments of the song, such as "rural felicity," and "Ye friends and ye neighbours."

But soon the attention of the listeners was distracted by the home-coming of the bride and bridegroom and their suite, and then Mrs. Bagshawe, after wiping away the natural tears of a mother who sees the daughter a wife, whom she last saw as a spinster,

bade all the people of position come to the first "sitting down." The elderly men moved forward first, ignoring all rules of precedence ; Wyllard waited for Charlotte and once again offered his arm. At table all sat where they chose, though the hostess had intended to place Wyllard beside Mrs. Ranger. By adroitly mingling with the crowd, however, the young man found a place for Charlotte and himself on the long settle at one end of the table.

The bride, smiling and happy, sat before the great cake, pressing her groom's hand. The clergyman and his wife both came at the last moment, and sat one on each side of Uncle Bagshawe. The lady was emaciated, with hair badger-grey ; she wore silk mittens over slender, high-bred hands ; she came of a county family, and although so poor accounted herself a person of some distinction. The courteous advances of the farmers and their wives she met very coldly—replying to all in severe monosyllables. The vicar stood up and intoned a long grace ; when it was finished Aunt Bagshawe was heard to declare to her next neighbour that the bride-cake was six years old, but the icing was, of course, only recent.

Then the women-servants, slowly and consequentially, came in carrying great dishes, whereon were sirloins, mountains of stuffed veal, haunches of mutton from sheep fed on limestone grass by the good farmer himself. And at a side-table others filled cups with tea that was mashed in big, gaudy-flowered jugs, made fifty years ago at the Old Bromley Potteries. A great noise of talking and laughing arose, and the faces of Aunt and Uncle Bagshawe shone with the content such hospitality always brings the givers. The vicar's wife, too, after a careful inspection of all the guests, became less stiff; the sight of Wyllard had assured her that she was not the only person connected with the aristocracy. She directed a few questions to him, such as: "had he been in Town lately?" "what was the latest music, since at Grassbrook, alas! she found herself sadly behind the times?" She awed the parishioners with a statement that the dear Bishop would lunch at the Vicarage after the next Confirmation.

In the midst of this crowd the young man had no desire to converse with Charlotte. Such speech as they used must be with none to overhear. He

saw that she dallied with her food—that she would not touch the meats—that once, when he turned suddenly, her hands rose as if to press her heart—that sometimes her eyes turned, with a half-frightened look, to the door, as if she expected some one to enter.

He was glad when the cake was cut, the speeches made, and the table left for the inferior folk of the “second sitting down.” Those who had dined went now to the green parlour, where the men smoked and the women (save the vicar’s wife, whose quality forbade), drank sherry from thick-stemmed glasses. The wedding-presents had all been removed to an upper chamber, and spread upon the white bed and the oaken chests. Aunt Bagshawe, snatching a moment from her duties as hostess, came to whisper, with a wise smile, that William Askew had arrived. Wyllard, watching Charlotte’s face, saw no lighting, but noted instead a slight contraction of the forehead—as if the girl awaited some distasteful sight.

The farmers spoke of whist—three sets sat to the little tables. The vicar’s wife, conscious of social duties well done, bade her husband prepare for de-

parture, and without listening to his plea for another hour, sailed majestically from the room, turning at the door to make her adieux in one bow. Mr. Ranger insisted upon Wyllard taking a hand, willy-nilly; Mrs. Ranger moved to Charlotte, who, after Wyllard's unwilling compliance, sat alone in a corner. For some reason or other—perhaps it was that they saw each other grow plain whenever they approached Charlotte, the young unmarried women kept apart.

"What a beautiful girl you are!" said the Squire's wife, fondling her hand. "I don't wonder at Mr. Wyllard's admiration!"

Charlotte's colour rose again. "Oh," she said piteously, "you must not say such things! I never met Mr. Wyllard before to-day."

Mrs. Ranger shook her head. "I don't care anything about that," she said. "You mayn't believe me, but I have the art of reading the eye. . . . Frankly, Miss Goodwin——"

Then the door opened and, first of the crowd, came William Askew. He was tall and burly, square and coarse of face; his little eyes were too light;

his lips were too short to hide discoloured teeth. Charlotte turned white of a sudden; it seemed as if the room had grown oppressively close. Mrs. Ranger, with unexpected tact, drew her out by another door to the garden, before Askew, who was greeting the other men, had noted her presence. A young moon was rising; the sky was dark and blue; in the flower-plots the gilliflowers were all a-bloom, and the air was laden with their perfume.

Mrs. Ranger took Charlotte's arm and walked from end to end of the rough terrace. "There!" she said, "the freshness will soon revive you—I think there's a touch of frost in the air. Miss Goodwin—Miss Goodwin—don't think me meddlesome—but you don't—you can't care for Askew. Why on earth did you get engaged to him?"

"I don't know," faltered Charlotte. "I thought—I thought it was the proper thing to do."

A man came from the door; he flung the glowing end of his cigar on the ground. Mrs. Ranger smiled to herself. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Wyllard," she said. "I just brought Miss Goodwin out—I thought she was going to faint—do stay with her a minute or

two till she's better—I'm so afraid of my tic." And with this she ran back to the house.

"The rubber is finished," said Wyllard. "I saw you grow pale—saw that good woman help you to the fresh air—I came the moment I could leave the table. You are not ill?"

"Not now," said Charlotte. "It was the heat. Let us go back. . . . Hark! Mr Green is playing again—they're going to dance in the other parlour."

"You will dance with me?" he said. "I know—something tells me—that you dance wonderfully well."

In the porch they came face to face with Askew. "Well, here you be!" he cried. "It just came to my mind as I hadn't seen you. My word, but you do look pratty! Gie me a kiss, Charlotte—you've ne'er gien me one yet; but, at a wedding——"

Charlotte's head fell slightly back; they passed on; but Wyllard knew that Askew had not received the favour. A minute later he saw both waltzing—the farmer, notwithstanding his heavy figure, with considerable agility. Charlotte was pale still—if

Mrs. Ranger had been by, she might have discovered something akin to terror in her eyes.

But Askew soon left Charlotte, to play "halfpenny nap" with a clamorous party of friends; and Wyllard and she joined the dancers. And in that waltz—though none but themselves knew—they saw nothing—felt nothing—knew nothing save that they were side by side. When the music ceased, they awoke to hear applause, and saw that all the other couples had drawn apart to watch.

Wyllard begged her to dance again; something in his voice thrilled her from head to foot. But before she could reply, Askew came and took her away.

"You're coming to sit by me, Charlotte, and watch me play," he said. "I don't hold with my sweetheart frolicking when I'm not by. Here's my money—you'll be banker."

So, for the next hour, Charlotte, her heart, heavy as a stone, sat behind his chair, and looked with unseeing eyes upon the gamblers, most of whom (Askew amongst them) were already excited with drink. At twelve o'clock, supper was announced, and she was

compelled to accompany him to table. Wyllard was now placed at the bridegroom's right hand—his glances came enquiringly—she felt that he understood every thought. To her that meal seemed an orgie ; she took home a recollection of over-boisterous laughter, of sayings more foolish than merry, of whispered innuendoes whose purport she did not realise.

Later, when dancing was resumed, Wyllard came to her again, and they entered the circle. But, at the first pause, Charlotte left her partner abruptly, and went to the parlour where Askew sat. He was losing now ; his brows were puckered with an ugly frown.

"It is past one o'clock," she said in his ear. "I am tired—I must go home."

Askew gripped her sleeve. "By Gosh!" he said, "I'm none leaving till I get some o' mine own back again. You go and watch the others—I'll come for you when I'm ready."

She moved to the window and looked out on the moonlight, then returned to his chair. "I'd better go," she said ; "I must go now."

"If you go, you go by yourself," he replied surlily. Charlotte turned and saw Mrs. Ranger watching her mysteriously. "I'd go if I were you," murmured the Squire's wife. "It's as light as day."

So Charlotte, in spite of the protestations of her weary aunt, went upstairs to don her hat, said good-bye to her and to the newly-wedded couple, and without another word to Askew, left the house. And she had not gone further than the end of the garden where the early gilliflowers grew, when Wyllard himself stepped from the shadow of the trees.

"Mrs. Ranger told me," he said. "My dogcart's waiting at the gate; I'm going to drive you home."

She did not speak; he felt her hand tremble as he helped her to her place; they passed in silence along the deserted roads and through the sleeping village of Milton. At times the man's breath came quickly; but Charlotte was calm now—calm with indescribable content. As the bay stopped at her gate, however, she sighed heavily. "We are here already!" she said.

Wyllard had been fumbling with the trinkets of

his fob ; he dropped the reins now, and taking her left hand tore away the glove and forced a worn ring upon the third finger.

"It was my mother's," he said huskily. "By the Lord, you shall keep it there till I put another in its place—and that'll be as soon as the law'll let me!"

Old Keziah flung open the house door and came hobbling down the path. Charlotte caught Wyllard's hands and pressed them to her heart.

"Feel how it beats for you," she whispered.

Down in the Clough.

DOWN IN THE CLOUGH.

THE Barleys' House lies in a green hollow at the end of Linen Clough. To reach the place from Milton, you climb the stony, ill-kept road to the summit of the "edge," then cross a few fields to an old pack-horse track of moss-green stones all hollow in the middle, where in wet weather the water lies in round, limpid pools; then you descend abruptly through a narrow ravine, its limestone walls barely covered with mountain pansies and bilberry, lichens and fishbone ferns. Half-way down lies the Druid's Well, a basin-shaped reservoir, where the frogs spawn in early spring. From the steps that rise to this prehistoric relic the first glimpse of the quaint house may be caught, nestling amidst its farm-buildings in a circle of stunted rowan trees.

The place dates from the sixteenth century It is

one of the seven granges that Endymion Barley, of Barley Lees (whose ruins, with the old chapel still intact, though to-day it is used as a cowshed, stand a good half-mile from Darrand Bridge), built for his seven sons. Not one is inhabited now, save the hall in Linen Clough; and there are no Barleys of the true stock left in all Peakland, save Hezekiah, the master, his wife Harriet, and their descendants.

A high-spirited man was Hezekiah, in spite of his poverty. It was family pride that had made him marry his kinswoman, soon after her father had died at Nether Flat Grange—in the year when an autumnal storm had brought the ancient walls to the ground. Hezekiah lived narrowly—what can be got nowadays from a poor eighty acres of marshy meadows and five hundred acres of the roughest moorland in the country? The gaffer was too haughty to let his shooting; too needy to pay a gamekeeper's wage. Such grouse and rabbits as grew to maturity were greedily snared by the poachers from Greenlow-in-the-Water, which all the world of the High Peak knows as a Mecca of the rag, tag, and bobtail. Hezekiah used to stir uneasily in his

bed when the toothless sheep-dogs gave warning that the ruffians came too near the house; but Harriet would bid him lie still; for although he was still plucky as in his youth, she knew that he would fare ill in an encounter, even though Stephen, his old man-servant, and the cow-lad followed with flails.

Harriet was as proud as her husband. Traditions are more carefully cherished by the womenfolk, and, despite the fact that she never spoke of the past, her memory teemed with pleasant hearsays. Sometimes, when her master was in the distant fields, she would steal across the neglected garden to a great coach-house, whose doors were locked over a majestic vehicle of last-century make, all embellished with lacquer and gilt ornament. Once, before the family had sunk so low, a Barley had been High Sheriff of the county, and this coach had been built in London, when he went up to the capital to see King George III. But when she had lowered the steps and stripped the holland covers from the cushions and sunk into a luxurious dust of lavender pollen, it was a more recent past that made her poor

thin arms press something invisible to her wasted bosom, where the black silk of her bodice lay in stiff, frayed folds.

Because she had played there with her bantling. She had not married until her thirtieth year, and only one child had been born. But such a child! —a beautiful, strong lad, fit for a kingdom; fair-skinned and yellow-haired and grey-eyed, and with a temper obstinate as his father's. Dear God, that old woman had suffered a long agony!

"When land is gone and money spent," said Hezekiah, "then learning is most excellent."

So Ralph Barley had been sent to the Bluecoat School. She used to cry still when she thought of the first time she had seen him in clipped curls and disfiguring clothes.

The Barleys have connections in the peerage. At the time of Ralph's leaving College, one, dispatched as Ambassador to a Court of Eastern Europe, wished to take the young man in his suite. Hezekiah's heart was set on his son remaining in Peakland, to restore the name of Barley to its original lustre. How this was to be done not even he himself knew; but it

had been the dream of his life ever since the gossips had clamoured to his chamber with news of a man-child. And Ralph chose to follow the primrose path : the life of the Clough was too wretched for a lad who wished to see the world. There had been words ; the father had bidden the son think well ; the son had thought well, and replied that he could not live in the old place. Then Hezekiah, wrought to fury, had sworn that whilst he lived Ralph should never again cross the threshold. The wife and mother had lost all her comeliness in those weeks of anger ; her smooth face had shrunken, and her brown hair turned grey and then white. Loving both equally, she had striven to make peace ; then had sat with folded hands, weeping inwardly. Not a day in all those years had passed without her grieving with the recollection of that last embrace, when her one child had gone out from her life. She knew that he was right ; she knew that if he stayed his life would be as harsh and hopeless as their own, therefore she felt no resentment. In sober truth, her love for both had only increased ; day by day her prayers grew more fervid. He wrote to her

regularly. Even now, when they had been parted for more than twenty years, the lame postman, who hobbled twice a week into Linen Clough, brought her every Monday a letter, addressed in a bold handwriting, whose contents told her of all his doings. The world had used him well; young as he was, he held a high Government post in India. He had married a gentlewoman, penniless but long-pedigreed; soon after the wedding, she had unexpectedly inherited a large fortune. The three children had been sent home to the wife's people. Harriet had their portraits, and sometimes, on her secret visits to the state coach, she would spread them in her lap and tell them childish tales of her own boy's adventures.

She had begged Hezekiah's leave to take the eldest in her care; the old man had turned a deaf ear to her entreaties. He had angrily ignored his son's desires to send ample supply of money from his own store. In the latter case, the mother had not urged him to consent, for a woman so high-minded does not care to be beholden to her offspring. She smoothed the telling of the refusal, and wrote with

painful lightness of other matters. Her lad loved her the more for every letter she sent; he trembled when he discovered that the Italian calligraphy which women affected in Hezekiah's youth was growing shaky and indistinct. His own letters, treasured in a sandalwood secretary, were so carefully placed that she could find each year's collection with closed eyes.

Now that the man and wife had completed the allotted span of years, and each saw the other failing, they began to long more powerfully than ever for the presence of their son. But Hezekiah gave no outward sign of wavering, and resolutely forbade his wife to tell Ralph of their weakness. And, day by day, Harriet was compelled to resign, one after another, the little household duties she had managed ever since her early wifehood. It came about that in her seventy-second year she fell ill of a sudden. One morning she did not creep downstairs, and Hezekiah, going to the chamber at breakfast-time, found her lying back in an easy-chair, her eyes closed, and her face ashen-hued. He had been a reserved man even in his passionate days, yet now, so warm was his pleading that when she had strength to re-

cognise his agonised face, she was struck with wonder.

" You are all I have, my Harry, my poor darling," he cried.

" Nay," she whispered, " not all. There's Ralph and Ralph's wife and the little ones."

He put his arm around her neck and drew her head to his breast. " All! all! I have none save you. You'll not leave me, Harry ; what should I do without you—alone? You've always been brave, you'll not go when I need you most."

She smiled wistfully and kissed his wrinkled forehead. " I'll try, husband," she said ; " but I'm very weak and old."

Her pride helped her to keep infirmities at bay ; in a short time she rose and resumed her share of the day's work. This Hezekiah deprecated, but she would have her way. Such tasks as she undertook might numb the poignancy of her longing ; she gave herself no moment for idle thought. Her letters to Ralph grew more tender than ever ; she discoursed often of the laughter and play that she, even then a woman approaching middle age, had shared

with her baby. But never once did she mention the thing that her heart craved for—the old mother's passion to gaze, before she died, into his frank eyes.

So the year went on, from spring to summer, from summer to autumn, and with each day she grew more fragile and transparent. She allowed no sigh to escape; her husband was fain to believe that she was content. He watched her with jealous care to discover in her countenance any look of wistfulness, yet never in their life together had he seen more placidity there. If she wept at all it was in the dead of night, when, worn with outdoor toil, he lay fast asleep by her side.

But one afternoon in harvest-time, having had occasion to leave the field where the servants were reaping, and to return to the house for another sickle, he hurried to the parlour, where she usually sat amidst quaint silk pictures and lac cabinets two centuries old, and found her favourite chair empty, and her linen-darning thrown carelessly on a side-table. Then he went to the bedchamber, but as she was not there he descended again to the parlour and tugged the hare's foot at the end of the bell-rope.

The housekeeper came briskly along the hall in pattens, which she doffed at the door. She was a short, thick-set dame, with a face brown and creased as a walnut-shell. She had lived at Nether Flat in Mrs. Barley's maiden days, and long service had given her the position almost of a humble relation.

"Where's the mistress, Lizbeth?" said Hezekiah; "I cannot find her."

"She was here a while ago," replied the housekeeper, "for I came to ask her about the blackberry wine." Her mouth closed tightly, and before Hezekiah could intercept her, she had donned her pattens again and clattered off to the kitchen garden. The old man swore faintly, and renewed his search—this time in the overgrown alleys of the garden. He could find her nowhere, and with each moment his anxiety grew less endurable, so that at last he was compelled to go back to the house to consult Lizbeth again.

When the woman saw him approach, his face full of trouble, she raised her apron to her eyes. She had known for many years where her mistress stole in Hezekiah's absence, and her instinct told her that

the place was sacred. Her memory held lively pictures of the day when Harriet played there with Ralph—the mother as happily as the child—at riding to London with my lord the sheriff, and talking quite freely to Farmer George. Little Ralph would tell the story of the travelled cat that wished for, and gained a sight of royalty.

"Mammy," said the curious boy, "was it the Queen's own chair, and did she sit in it when the mouse was frightened under? I thought Kings and Queens sat on thrones!"

Hezekiah Barley was not a man to be crossed; even Lizbeth, after the lifetime of service, dared not venture too far. When he repeated his question concerning the whereabouts of the mistress, she gave no evasive answer, but fell a-weeping in sober earnest.

"Oh, master," she faltered, "I never thought to tell you, but the mistress is in the coach-house. She always goes there when she's left alone of an afternoon."

Hezekiah strode through the stableyard, on whose west side a small window of green bubbled glass lighted the coach-house. He peered through the

corner of a pane that was not cloaked with cob-webs, but saw nothing, for an odd dimness had come to his eyes. Afterwards he unfastened a postern-gate that led to a court, which opened to the garden. Here were the great doors, unlocked and slightly ajar. The sound of Harriet's voice, very loud and strenuous, reached him as he laid his hand on the woodwork: he stood stockstill and listened. His wife was praying, and her prayer was full of wild appeal.

“Oh, Jesus Christ, Whose Holy Mother nursed Thee in Her arms, have pity on an old, old woman. Oh, Saviour of the World, help me—let me no longer be as one who has not known motherhood—let me keep house with my son's children about me. Soften, I beseech Thee, the heart of him I loved, and love as powerfully as mine own issue—break down the walls of his firmness—let the wish to see our son become too great to be contended against.”

Her husband's hands rose to his face; he groaned aloud. From the closed chariot came the sound of muffled sobbing.

“Oh, Thou Who wert the one Son of Thy Mother,

help me in this my grief. I am too old to bear my burden in patience, too feeble not to cry out. Shall the agony of my labour, the longer agony of these years and years of separation, stand for naught? Send me not down to the grave without seeing my lad again! Let me but lay his hand in his father's."

After a long interval of silence, Hezekiah crept closer to the coach, and saw Harriet kneeling with bowed head. On the faded cushions before her lay tiny garments of fine needlework—and a christening-cloak of yellowed silk embroidered with blue hearts-eases, knitted socks no bigger than a man's thumb, a worn coral with battered silver bells. And on the opposite seat were spread toys—wooden houses and bricks for palace-building, and tin soldiers and tattered copy-books, between whose ruled lines ran ancient maxims writ in a straggling hand.

This had been the lad's playhouse, and these were the things that he had loved. It was the old woman's playhouse now—a playhouse of tears and everlasting sorrow.

Hezekiah leaned silently over her shoulder, and put his cheek against her own.

"Harry," he said in a husky voice, "I'll send for the lad. I can't bide without him any longer."

The mother moaned again, this time with perfect gladness.

"I'm tired, husband," she whispered; "you must help me to the house."

But Hezekiah took her in his arms—they were strong even yet as an oaken sapling's—and carried her to her own place in the parlour.

"I'll send him word this very day," he said as he kissed her. "Now rest quiet, dear, so that you may be strong when he comes. I have only another hour of work, and then I'll be with you again."

He went away with Harriet's tender laughter following him; the hallowed laughter of the woman whose lover has found his true self. And when he reached the fields, old Stephen pointed out to him a travelling carriage and a horseman descending the narrow road of the Clough. Hezekiah, without a word, left the reapers and went to the gate and watched with hungry eyes.

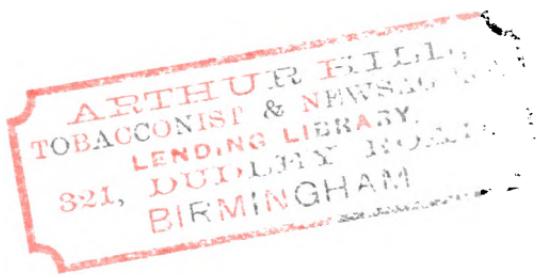
The rider leaped from the saddle and stood bare-

headed before him; a stalwart brown man with a pleading face.

"Father," he cried, "I have come back to you. I wish to stay with you; I wish my sons to grow up in the old home. It has called to me for years and years. We are all here—my wife and my boys—your boys; do not turn them away."

"I have been a proud fool, Ralph," he gasped; "but to-day I was going to bid you come. Your mother has cried out for you"

Ralph sprang again to the saddle; the grandsire groped his way to the carriage which was standing some yards away. And Harriet unconsciously felt herself drawn to the threshold of the great hall. There, in the rich glow of autumn sunset, she saw her man-child coming to clasp her to his breast.



A Night on the Moor.

A NIGHT ON THE MOOR.

THE sun had set in a dull red glow, and twilight fell with odd swiftness. Although the sparse thorns of the moor, all inclining from west to east, in obedience to the prevalent winds, were scarce tinged with the bright hues of autumn, a few thin flakes of snow were falling gently.

Lindsay Warmsworth, who had rented the shooting from Squire Greenleaf, buttoned his coat, and finally discharging his gun, prepared to return to the Lodge. That afternoon, since his friends had passed on to other places and a new party was not to arrive until the following day, he had been obliged to tramp alone. Barton, the old keeper, had complained mysteriously of rheumatism in his shaky knees, and after begging him on no account to be benighted, had tottered homeward when they

reached the confines of the park. The bag which was slung over Warmsworth's shoulder was heavy with slaughtered grouse; a brace of woodcock, too rare a prize to be carried in such plebeian company, bulged in his right-hand pocket.

This great stretch of tableland in the very heart of the Peak country, was covered chiefly with ling and *sphagnum*. Here and there, round beds of rushes, wet and blood-coloured, disclosed the existence of treacherous marsh. Warmsworth, after passing a Druid's Circle, found an ancient bridle-path of hollowed slabs, which he had never seen before, and surmising that it passed in the direction of his resting-place, he began to hurry, thankful to be relieved from the necessity of carefully picking his way over the sodden ground. As far as he could understand, he had more than three miles to cover before reaching comfortable shelter; but being young and hot-blooded, he felt no tremors, and lifting a powerful voice in a popular hunting song, he shaped the rhythm to the muffled sound of his footsteps. After a while, however, so intense grew the blackness and so heavy the snowfall that he stopped short in his

elegy of "John Peel," and with a sudden uneasiness drew out his compass, struck a match, and strove to discover if he were on the right track. A gust blew out the light immediately, but not before he had seen that the needle had fallen from its pivot; without further delay he continued to proceed, trusting to a keen sense of locality which he had never known to fail.

After he had proceeded for at least an hour, and now not yet reached the sloping clough at whose lower end stood the Lodge, he found that he had left the path and was straying knee-deep in heather, whose branches were so tough that no firing could have been done for years. The snow was still falling, and the wind rose in low soughs. He began, unwillingly, to realise that he was lost, and, in spite of Barton's deprecations, in all probability must remain on the moor until daybreak. Fortunately, just as he had resigned hope of finding any shelter, his outstretched left hand touched a stout wooden door, and after a brief struggle with the latch he entered a shepherd's hut, mud-walled and thatched with turves. On striking another match, he discovered, to his great

relief that the place was waterproof, and that, in readiness for the winter, a huge faggot of fir-boughs lay in a corner, beside a great stone, above which rose a narrow chimney. To set light to a few twigs was the work of a moment; soon a brave fire was crackling lustily. A bed of dried bracken was spread on trestled boards; he sat down, drew out his pipe, and thanked the gods for a harbour of refuge. The resinous sap of the fir-wood diffused a fragrant odour that overpowered the fumes of the tobacco, and the flames cast dancing shadows on the dark brown walls.

Ere long the heat of the place made him drowsy; he lay full length on the bracken, and with his face turned towards the glow, fell fast asleep. He was awakened very soon, however, by the distant barking of a dog, and in the belief that someone was searching for him, he sprang to his feet and threw open the door. Outside the blackness was denser than ever; the firelight struck against a barrier of mist. The downfall had ceased, there was no longer any moaning of the wind. Half-convinced that the noise had existed only in his own fancy, he placed his

fingers again on the latch, when it was repeated, and peering in the direction whence it came he saw, near by, the greenish light of a lantern. In another moment a young woman glided forward and stood, like a gorgeous shadow, on the threshold. The lantern swung from one hand, the other held a gauzy handkerchief, slipped through the collar of a timid white fawn; in the background crouched a huge old mastiff, whose eyes gleamed sullenly.

The lady's beauty, coupled with the quaintness of her attire, numbed Warmsworth's faculty of speech; he did naught but gaze stupidly on the strange picture. Her skin was very fair, touched with a faint pink in the cheeks; her eyes were deep blue and lustrous, her mouth archly curved. On either temple hung a cluster of black curls, connected across the smooth forehead with a jewelled trellis-work; above rose a turban of gold gauze (one fringed end of which fell to her neck), surmounted with the plumage of a bird of Paradise. Her gown, of carmine velvet, was not of the present fashion; the bodice tight to the waist and heart-shaped at the bosom, the skirt swelled over a great hoop. This was nearly covered

with a long white satin-lined mantle of beet-red with vast sleeves; a collar and cape of sable lay lightly on her polished shoulders, unclasped so that a brilliant necklace was visible. There were no signs of travel in her costume; her broze sandals were not even damped with the snow.

"La!" she cried, in dismay. "I had hoped to find shepherd Nawe here, to beg him to shelter my poor fawn. Marlowe turned her out on the moor, hoping, perchance, she'd die before daybreak. He hates all gifts that others offer me. I took Lightfoot and went a-seeking her. Not a long task, the wretch lay under my chamber window!"

Warmsworth was still tongue-tied; the stranger shrugged and pouted. "Lord, what an outlandish costume!" she cried. "Prythee, good gentleman, art come from the shores of Greenland?"

He flushed, and found his speech. "No, madam, but from Calton Lodge," he said. "I am belated here, after a day's shooting; I have kindled a fire to rest by till morning."

"A *monsieur!*!" she exclaimed, with a merry laugh. "No Englishman spoke with such an accent.

But you are wrong, sir, in meditating a night spent here. My own house of Offerton lies not half a mile away, and Marlowe, my husband, shall play host at my bidding. So—no demur, I entreat—come with me now; we'll leave Crystalla, the fawn, in your stead, and you shall bring life to a deadly dull place."

There was something so fascinating in the beauty's aspect that Warmsworth had no thought of declining. The mode of her garments perplexed him somewhat; never before had he seen a woman gowned so strangely. Yet there was no doubt that what she wore became her vastly. In some odd way she reminded him of an eighteenth century painting of a belle of the Georgian Court. A brief glance at her hands showed him that they were daintily kept and extremely small; she displayed a fine ring upon each finger.

"I shall be very grateful," he replied. "I had no knowledge of a house so near the Lodge——"

"Why," she said, "if 'tis Calton Lodge you speak of—you are full seven miles from 't! I am taking you to Offerton Hall, in Barley Clough—surely you've heard of the place. My husband, Stephen Marlowe

—the last of the Marlowes—compels me to live in this barren Peakland."

"Forgive me," said Warmsworth, "but I am almost a stranger here, I know naught of this country. This season I rented Squire Greenleaf's shooting for a whim——"

"Heavens!" interrupted the lady. "Will Greenleaf's shooting! And I saw him but yesterday, and he said not a word o' t'. But he was ever a sly, cunning lad! His eyes tell me that—when he seems to be looking at the wall, Lord! he's noting everything that passes! Now, sir, I beg of you, let us go on to Offerton; I'm warm by nature, but this night's enow to strike one dead."

The white fawn (it was evidently accustomed to the shelter of a roof), lay before the hearth; Warmsworth closed the door, and the lady, who refused to relinquish the lantern, walked a few paces in front, with the dog at her side.

"I must tell you that Steve is a man of odd fancies," she observed. "As jealous a rogue as was e'er begotten—he cannot bear those whom he loves to give word or look to another! But you, an out-

landish stranger, benighted, he won't fail to offer you a hearty welcome."

There was a shade of doubt in her voice; she paused, as if reflection told her that she had been better advised to leave Warmsworth in the shepherd's hut. She sighed lightly because of her fleeting cowardice, then hurried on again.

"To-night he had a whimsie for turning my Crystalla loose. I doted on her too much, said he, and 'twas because my lord the Earl of Newburgh bred her. If I had not unchained Lightfoot and donned my cloak and ran out, the poor angel would have frozen stark. I'll send her back to my lord to-morrow, if I can find in my heart to part with her. Yet Steve's a good soul, though there's black blood in his veins. Sometimes, I protest, he makes me tremble like to an aspen leaf. He was in one of his wildest humours an hour ago, but I ne'er show that I'm daunted, and I gave him word for word—told him naught should hinder me from having my own way. Yet, though I prattle on with other men, in my heart his roots twine everywhere."

Her fantastic excitement and tantalising confidences wrought Warmsworth to great curiosity; but he dared ask no questions. At a gateway in a lofty arch of limestone, she fitted her master-key in the lock.

"'Tis the nearest way," she said, "though there is no boundary betwixt the garden and the moor on the eastern side. Were it not night-time, and over-cold, we would loiter here and you should tell me of life in town. Ay, me, Steve has not let me leave this prison for two dreary twelvemonths! None but country joskins to talk folly with—the overflow of my love to fall on such silly creatures as Crystalla and old Lightfoot."

Ere they had passed half-way up the broad path the valves of a great door swung inward, and a man appeared on the topmost stone of a staircase that descended to a terrace. To Warmsworth's bewilderment, he was attired as quaintly as the lady, in black satin coat and knee-breeches, and vest of embroidered green. A white-periwig covered his head, in peculiar contrast with the jetty curved eyebrows. His sparkling eyes were of a hue to match; the

corners of his mouth were drawn upward, uncovering small white teeth. Despite the malevolence of his expression, it was impossible to deny that his beauty was equal to the lady's.

She caught Warmsworth's sleeve and drew him forward. "Steve," she said, in a voice that quavered perceptibly, "in my journey for the fawn's safety, I came across a wayfarer, poor gentleman, who had taken shelter in Nawe's hut, and knowing that you delight in showing hospitality to all, I brought him here."

Her husband lifted his forefinger to his brow, as if to smooth out a gathering frown, then giving Warmsworth a cordial welcome, led the way to the hearth of a dining parlour.

"I am vastly wearied of the folk I know," he said, "and 'tis indeed a pleasure to see a stranger in this house. For my wife's sake" (the lady gave a little cry of surprise) "I live here and make the best of't. This is her inheritance, remote from the world of gaiety; I warrant Sophia loves the seclusion."

"Bah!" she exclaimed. "I do not love it—I shall

never love a gaol-house, although I may love my keeper."

She flung off her mantle and glided across the room to an opened spinet; still standing, she used her right hand to draw out a few chords, then sang the first words of "Phyldia flouts me":

"Oh, what a plague is love ! I cannot bear it ;
She will inconstant prove, I greatly fear it."

Warmsworth, glancing at his host, saw in his countenance a look of agonising pain, that changed instantly into an agreeable smile. The wife left her spinet and went to an oaken buffet that bore, amongst bright pewter-ware, a stone flask and a silver loving cup. She drew out the stopper of the former, filled the vessel to the brim, then drank lightly.

"Here's to a happy meeting!" she said. "Here's to a joyful break in our dulness!"

She passed it to Warmsworth, touching meaningly that part of the edge which her lips had pressed. Stephen Marlowe's back was turned for the nonce, and the young man, unaware that he faced a mirror,

nodded and drank, ending with an audible kiss, at sound of which the husband swung round suddenly upon his heel. Sophia thereupon made a demure curtsey, her hands clasped over her bosom, where the velvet met the frilled muslin of her chemisette.

"Alack and well-a-day," she sang. "She loves me to gainsay——".

Stephen strode forward and caught her by the wrist. "Damn you!" he muttered huskily, "you *have* met this man before!"

"And if I have, what then?" she responded. "Surely I met men before I met you. At the Court, indeed, I knew *gentlemen*, ere I was fool enough to listen to your prayers. I command you to release my hand! I have no liking for purple bracelets made by your iron fingers!"

"My God!" he groaned, as he thrust her roughly aside, "you go too far, Sophy—to speak thus in a stranger's presence!"

Then, without waiting for her reply, he averted his face and abruptly left the chamber. She sighed wearily, motioned Warmsworth to rest by the fire, and putting down her rebellious hoop she sank into

the recesses of a heavy gilt-framed brocade-covered armchair.

"Alas!" she said, almost whimpering, "'tis very hard to live with such a housemate. Had I known that Marlowe'l d use me thus, I'd have stopped my ears with wax—as Ulysses did when the Siren chanted. A belle—the most famous toast of three years agone, to be kept barred in a cage—to be slighted afront a foreigner! See, his violence hath already marked my poor skin—there's five scarlet spots growing darker every instant."

She held out her hand; Warmsworth knelt and drew it nearer the firelight. Curiously enough the quaintness of their manners reflected itself upon him, he began unconsciously to mimic demeanour and speech.

"Prythee, Mistress Sophia," he said, "do not blame me, though I be the cause——"

Her merry laugh rang out again! Perhaps that was why the tapestry curtain of another doorway, opposite to that by which they had entered, fluttered convulsively.

"Not Mistress!" she cried, "Lady Sophia—Sophy

to my friends and to my jealous husband. A marquis's daughter, wedded to a commoner! . . . Ah, I do not blame you, sir; I ask but a penance—each stain to be kissed. A kiss is the best salve in the world."

A low moan came from behind the tremulous curtain as the young man's lips touched the warm satiny skin. Doubtless Lady Sophia heard it, for the light in her eyes danced very fantastically, and she stooped until her face was very near his own.

"Hist," she whispered, "let you and me play a comedy, such as Mr. Wycherley wrote ages ago. I'll do the talking—your part is but to smile and languish and say 'Ay' everytime I pause. Now for't—the curtain rises!" Her voice rose, she began to speak in tones brimful of feigned tenderness and delight.

"La! Sir Michael, to think that to-night we should meet so unexpectedly, when to-morrow, by assignation at the Druid's Circle, which I described in my summons, you were to wait my coming, whilst Steve was a-hunting the fox. He never knew of your existence, by Gemini! he never shall know what

passed between us. There's an infinitely keener joy in stolen kisses—such as you wot of in Nawe's hut."

"Ay," said Warmsworth, "Ay."

"Dost remember at my aunt's ball, the Bath Assembly Rooms the place—after young Mr. Beckford had led me through the minuet, you fumed and fretted (foolish boy!) and swore that you would spit him on your rapier. There was budding down on your upper lip then, and your skin was fair as mine. And to appease you, dearest, I promised to wed you some day, but sure I was not in earnest. Why, heart o' me, I was scarce sixteen at the time, and you were but three months older! When your folk sent you on the Grand Tour, we both wept like bantlings!"

She linked her arm around his neck, hollowed her palm to support his chin, and turned his face upwards. A rebellious fever heated his veins; he would have given much for her words to have been sober truth.

"Why play comedy any longer?" he murmured, hoarsely.

"Nay, you'll spoil my pretty mischievous plot," she

whispered in return. "Be your old self, Sir Michael," she cried. "Steve hath no inkling of whom you are, or how we loved—and still love!"

"Ay," he said.

"I vow," she continued, "that you're as goodly to look upon as you were eight years ago. Many and many a night have I awoke in my bed, thinking that no comelier man was ever created since the days of Adam. We were made for each other—there's conceit for you . . . Can you say in earnest that I am still as beautiful as in those days when you called me your little wife, and we broke asunder a silver ring?"

"Lovelier," said Warmsworth, with an enthusiasm that was not pretended, "infinitely lovelier."

Her cheek was pressed against his, her breath stirred the tiny curls on his temples.

"Had I known that time would work no change in your affections," she said, "I'd ne'er have harkened to Steve's protestations. But he swore to kill himself if I said him nay—he followed me like a spaniel—battered at my door till in very hopelessness I let him enter. And you were flaunting abroad with

your tutor, loving the maids of Italy and France and Allemagne, whilst I had naught of you save a broken bit of silver."

She drew hereby to her full height and stood apart, casting a mischievous look at the further doorway. Warmsworth rose from his knees and confronted her; his eyes bright as hers and as vivid a colour in his cheeks.

"Steve is far away," she said, "working off his fury in a flight over the moor. He has never learned—shall never learn—what is hidden in the trinket I keep warm against my heart" (her fingers began to toy with the laces of her bosom), "for I kept it sacred to you and swore no other man should e'er open it."

Warmsworth no longer remembered his injunction to say naught but "ay." He moved nearer; she retreated a step. "Let me see it?" he cried.

The coquette laughed for the last time, and thrust out her arms, as if to fend his touch. "Nay," she said. "Of my own will, I'll ne'er show it." She plucked from her bodice a loop of sky-blue ribbon. "You shall not make me do what I would not!"

He came nearer still and clutching the ribbon

strode to draw the locket from its nest. Of a sudden she grew white and faint, reeling back against her chair.

"The comedy is played," she faltered.

Marlowe strode forward, tearing the tapestry from its hooks. So fearful was he to behold that Warmsworth shrank aside, as if in grim earnest the man was possessed with a demon. Sophia strove to regain her composure, and grasping one of his clenched fists essayed to relax its tension.

"My dearest," she stammered, piteously, "'twas but a piece of acting; I ne'er saw the man before to-night, and I knew that you were present all the time. I saw the curtain shake; I heard you gasp and groan."

Then she quailed in silence before the madness she had evoked. Warmsworth laid his hand on the lappet of Marlowe's coat.

"The lady speaks the truth, man!" he cried.

But Marlowe, paying no heed to his words, pointed to the door by which they had entered, and his wife crept from the chamber, with him following stealthily in her wake. The door slammed, and

Warmsworth heard the turning of a key. He beat upon the panels, but nobody came ; he hastened to the other door, to find it barred with an invisible spring. Beyond the heavily-mullioned oriel window a faint ray of moonlight showed him two mist-cloaked figures—one in pursuit of the other—scurrying over the snow-covered garden. . . .

He began to pace restlessly to and fro, ever and anon striking the door and the floor, in the vain hope of summoning some servant.

At last, wearied with over-excitement, he flung himself in a chair by the sinking fire, and fell into an uneasy slumber, from which, after curious dreams of mingled joy and horror, he was awakened by the creaking of rusty hinges.

His eyes were dull and heavy ; some moments passed before he recognised old Barton, the keeper, who stood at his side. Instead of the panelled walls of Marlowe's dining-parlour, he saw piled clods, with chinks that admitted a dim daylight.

"How did I come here ?" he inquired in a voice that sounded peculiarly rasping.

"Lord hev' mercy, sir," said the relieved gaffer,

"yo've been lost on th' moor, on a neeght when no folk o' these parts'l'd dare to venture aat. Et's ten o'clock—at dawn I tuk th' cob an' started a-seekin' yo'. Yo' be grey as death!"

"Have you a flask?" said Warmsworth. "I feel cramped and sick."

He drank and rose from the bracken. At the door stood a grey pony, which Barton helped him to mount. Neither spoke as they moved slowly through the rain, until they came to some rough piles of stone, where Barton, who was a good Catholic crossed himself devoutly.

"Theere's Offerton Owd Hall," he remarked in a low voice. "At least theer et stood. Et's been i' ruins for more nor a hunnerd year—sin' Mr. Marlowe draaned hes lady i' th' marsh, through jealousy."

Tryphena Goes to Town.

TRYPHENA GOES TO TOWN.

HALF a mile beyond the Nether End, and near by the head of the Dale, stands the string of houses known as Shepherd's Hall. The largest, at the end, is comparatively modern, having been built fifty years ago by Elias Cobnor, the present occupant; the other four, spreading like the tail of a newt, are quainter—seventeenth-century built, with mullioned, diamond-latticed windows. Elias's grandfather, a fascinating page-boy in the service of the Wright family, was fortunate enough to win his widowed mistress's liking, and at last, despite her many years of seniority, her hand and her little estate. The unsound part was pulled down and the present house built when Elias came of age, and the remainder of the hall was divided, fitted with front doors and staircases and let to tenants of repute.

Afront the cottages stretches as far as the road the old herb-garden, now turned into a grass-plot with a border in which one may find many rich perennials. There's a dignity about the place; the folk who live there are proud both of the façade and the common lawn. The road-wall is coped with massive stones, each with sockets in which long ago oaken balustrades were fixed; the gateposts of the central path are tall, well-proportioned, and carved in handsome panels.

The window-trimmings are quite enough to show that tenants of gentility live there—the blinds being fringed with something like lace, the curtains spotless, the sills supporting flowers that thrive all the year round under the morning sun. The glass, too—some of it greenish with age—is polished till it reflects like a mirror, and the door-latches and knockers are worn thin with constant rubbing.

The end cottage has the most distinction. As you walk down the long flagged path, your eyes are caught by the sight of a quaint brass cage between the mullions—a cage which contains an ancient parrot green as an emerald, and a tall carved

press which is fixed in a recess to the right, and which once probably held the treasures of Wright housewives.

It is here that Tryphena Pallison lives—Tryphena Pallison, the genius of Milton—Tryphena Pallison, the painter, whose works may be found honourably hanging in every parlour in the Dale. Tiny pictures, finical pictures, pictures of a toy world whose deities are the formal good children of Mrs. Sherwood's day. Not a leaf, a stone, a bird, an animal in any but is drawn so carefully—so precisely—so *finally*. . . . They make the sympathetic stranger wistful—the desire to delight with absolute accuracy hurts sometimes.

Though Miss Pallison (pronounced Pauson) is seventy now, she has not yet reached the zenith of her fame. I am inclined to believe that a hundred years hence her work will be greatly valued by the antiquaries for its depicting of places long forgotten. Ancient gateways, ancient houses, though their character only develops late in life, do not last for ever. When the history of Peakland families is written, these odd pictures will tell stories to the

world. They tell stories already to those who have ears to hear. But Tryphena is the genius of Milton, the painter of Milton, the Bohemian of Milton, and one of the biggest-hearted women to be found anywhere.

A modest, unassuming creature, too, spite of her great gift. When complimented, as she often is, she sometimes takes from the afore-mentioned press a great sheepskin-covered Bible, published by one Baskett in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and embellished with many grotesque copper-plate engravings of the world's masterpieces. "When I feel vainglorious," she says, "I look at this and am put in my proper place. I know that I have a talent; but it is not a great talent. There was once a Frenchman—a poet—who said" (she aired a sprightly tongue, then translated for those who knew not the language), "My glass is little; but I alone drink from my glass!"

Still, had she herself not been greatly beloved and her art greatly revered by her friends, it is possible that a shock she received last Spring might have destroyed all her brightness, have changed all her

wholesome geniality to utter bitterness, have taken from her all that was worth most in life. The event certainly marred one admirable feature—her trust in the outer world; she no longer disbelieves in the jealousy of other workers; she declares, moreover, that purity and generosity and true perception abide alone in remote country places. And her experience was so painful that since then she has never visited the great manufacturing city; but has done all her shopping in the unspoilt market-town of Calton St. Anne's, whose bridge and shallow river and couple of swans her brush has depicted at least a hundred times.

It was in mid-April that the trouble came. On the seventeenth of that month, at her usual reception (on the third Saturday of every month she dispensed a neat hospitality to her most intimate contemporaries), her large parlour was set in order—the latest work being displayed on easels, and the square piano opened and a yellowed copy of Haydn's "Menuet de la Symphonie de la Reine" opened on the music-stand. At six o'clock she donned her silver-grey silk gown—a stiff thing of great age, her

cambric collar, *à la Byron*, and deftly rearranged her frost-touched ringlets. Being mistress of a small income (for her pictures she accepted no payment, declaring that Art was its own reward, and only stipulating that the recipients framed them in good English gilt), she indulged her Bohemian whims, and, after partaking of coffee and sandwiches, such of her guests as cared and dared might sip curacoa or menthe or benedictine from the tiniest glasses with white spirals inside the stems. Indeed, it is recorded that, many years ago, she actually excelled herself by offering vodka and akkaavit on two separate occasions—after her nephew, Tobias Pallison, the sheep-shear maker, had visited Denmark for the sake of enlarging his business. Tobias died, however, and these rarer drinks were never repeated.

The frequenters of her conversazioni were people of her own age—genteel people, who had been moored all their lives in a backwater. Three came from the other cottages—Miss Hubbard, the last of the Hubbards of Camsdale, who could play faint, sweet melodies on the old piano; Mrs. Germaine, the relict of a long since deceased rector of Milton; and

the widowed Mr. Morgan, who had been the National schoolmaster. The first was small, thin, angular and vivacious; when she was not playing she flourished an elaborate gold eyeglass—when she played she was often moved to tears. Mrs. Germaine was squat, portly and red-cheeked—her mouth was like the mouth of a fish just ready for the fly. She always wore black, and carried a reticule of velvet; a quaint etiquette made her wear throughout the evening a pair of dove-coloured gloves. Mr. Morgan was tall and slender; he bowed gracefully, and brought his finger-tips together whenever addressed by the ladies. He was given to quotations from the Lake Poets, and his speech was somewhat marred by the vagaries of his very handsome teeth.

The fourth was Tryphena's landlord, Elias Cobnor. Elias presented, both in appearance and manner, an ideal picture of the antiquated country gentleman with no business ability, but with a good fortune well invested by his lawyer. He had never married—had never been in love. At the fall of the leaf he suffered from gout, and wore black cloth slippers with the toes cut off. His predominant feeling was

pride in Tryphena's greatness, and pride in the fact that he and she had been friends from childhood.

That evening, when all her little company was assembled in the big parlour with the oaken ceiling, Tryphena had some difficulty in curbing the desire to broach the subject before the rites of hospitality were celebrated. She showed some absence of mind, too, and for the first time over-sweetened Elias's coffee. After the refreshments had been partaken of, and the table cleared by the little white-capped maid, she asked Miss Hubbard to play, and when Heller's "Tarentelle" was finished, insisted upon more, as if she wished for time to compose herself. The listeners sat, gazing at the beams with upturned faces; but Tryphena's eyes went again and again to a curtained recess beside the fireplace, where she kept her painting materials.

At last, when the music had finally ceased, and just as Mr. Morgan was about to discuss as usual a philosophical poem which he had been minded to write for many years, the painter rose from her wicker chair and stood, her hand uplifted, in the middle of the hearthrug.

"We have been friends for so many, many years," she said, "that I am nowise ashamed to ask for your whole attention—your full consideration of what I am about to tell you. If I had not always believed in your criticisms (for, too kind as they have been, they show true artistic feeling), I'd not have entertained the idea for a single moment."

When she paused, Mr. Morgan left his chair and bowed gravely. His former profession and his literary knowledge gave him the right of speakership.

"Dear Miss Pallison," he said, "I answer for everybody present—all true friends—I declare that we shall all be honoured by any confidence that you may see fit to place in us."

Tryphena smiled and nodded. "Ah," she said, "you have all been so good to me—far too good if the truth must be told. And such kindness weakens—I have often thought that but for it—mind you it has been very sweet to me—but for your generous appreciation, I might have taken my place in the tournament of life, instead of resting fenced from the world like a bird in a cage."

She pointed to the green parrot, which, mindful of Mr. Morgan's quotations, called for "Poetry!" Mrs. Germain cried out upon the intelligence of the bird; Miss Hubbard envied her hostess such a sociable companion. Elias Cobnor, who sat near the curtain, shook his head. "In friendship one cannot be too tender," he said; "particularly when the friend is such a one as Miss Tryphena Pallison."

His voice was somewhat strained, somewhat fearful. Tryphena turned towards him in some amazement; for he was usually silent, and had never before paid her such a pretty compliment. A faint colour rose to her cheeks; if the others had been looking they might have remarked that her eyes were shining very brightly.

She drew a newspaper from her pocket, and unfolding it, moved into the circle of lamplight. "To be direct," she said, "I must tell you that often and often in my life the temptation has come to me—the temptation to let the outer world recognise my gift. And I have thrust it aside, telling myself that a wider fame could not bring me greater happiness than I enjoy. My dear, dear friends (her voice

trembled), I have had no thought of disloyalty to you—you have kept my heart glowing—but—but I cannot strangle the painter's temperament. You have done me honour—the sweetest honour that I shall ever know——”

She lifted the sheet to her face. “In this journal,” she said, “I read that, at Saltlee, there's to be an exhibition of Peakland pictures, and that painters are requested to send in their works. And—with your leave—I would like—would like the people to have some of mine—to show the crowd that work known only in its own immediate country, may be worthy of the common admiration.”

She ceased; a long silence followed, as if her hearers were hurt to the heart. Mr. Morgan, after odd contortions of the lips was, as usual, the first to speak.

“I don't deny that your wish is natural,” he said soberly. “We have, I am afraid half-consciously, restricted you—'twas our duty many years ago (I felt it myself), to urge you to gratify a larger audience. But my selfishness (indeed *our* selfishness, for I make no doubt we are all guilty), has prevailed. With

the admiration of thousands, you'll no longer care for our poor applause."

Two tears crept down Tryphena's face and pattered on the Byron collar; but the muscles fought to preserve her smile. "How cruel to say that!" she cried. "As if all the praise——" Then the poor soul sat down and covered her eyes; and Miss Hubbard with fine tact played Beethoven's "Adieu to the Piano" five times, and "The Merry Shepherd" thrice, whilst Mrs. Germain, who had drawn her chair closer, kept a comforting hand on the painter's shoulder. Elias had turned his back to the company; the sight of Tryphena's distress had moved him more than he cared for the others to see. He stood beside the cage, blindly stroking the parrot's head with a forefinger.

Tryphena laughed apologetically at last. "I am foolish," she said. "I'll dismiss the thought at once rather than cause anyone pain."

But now all protested, and so heartily that her natural cheerfulness soon returned, and she kissed the women and shook hands with the men quite in the Bohemian fashion. Then she drew aside the

curtain of the recess, and showed them the wall covered with a choice collection of such masterpieces as she could not find in her heart to part with. There was Darrand Bridge, its arches perfectly reflected on the placid surface of the river, which is weired there for the race that turns the wheels of Calver Mill; there was the ruined Bretton Hall, with its garden walls crowned with stone urns whence issue lambent flames; there was the cross in the church-yard—the dove-house of Fanshawe Gate—the village green with the old stocks in the foreground. And the finest, most admirably neat picture of all, was the picture of my lord duke's house, six miles away as the crow flies, painted from the summit of Bole Hill (overlooking Milton village), and so exact that each pane of each window in sight might be counted. Moreover, all the fountains were playing—the great “Emperor” spreading his veil to shroud half the background of sombre trees; and a herd of fallow deer was grazing in the shade of “Queen Mary's Bower.” The flag fluttered from the roof of the “Hunting Stand,” sure token that the owner was at home.

The four friends complimented so fervently that the tears came again to Tryphena's eyes. "You cannot realise," she said, "how much your praise has helped me. I sometimes think that but for your generous acknowledgment I should have ceased to work long ago. I have painted everything in this neighbourhood again and again—occasionally I have feared that my manner was deteriorating; but you have ever reassured me."

She pointed out the beauties of each picture; she quoted from Gilpin's "Forest Scenery"; she used brave words such as *chiaro-oscuro* and *genre*. Then, being rich in anecdote, she told them rare things about other painters, drawn from her study of the works of Cellini, Vasari, Horace Walpole and Allan Cunningham. All laughed very freely over Benvenuto and the salamander—she always called him "Benvenuto," as though he were contemporary and intimate. And not one of those tales but all had heard at least fifty times—and yet all delighted in the repetition as one delights in a draught of the good wine endeared by association.

But after a while, as if suddenly conscience-stricken,

she begged them to forgive her for her egotism, and refused to speak any more either of herself or of any of the geniuses who had dwelt in past centuries. Then, yielding to her entreaties that all would behave as if naught were in the air, Mrs. Germain, accompanied upon the pianoforte by Miss Hubbard, sang in a voice somewhat rough, but none the less sweet—like the “old man” apples in Elias’s orchard—songs by Mrs. Arkwright and Mrs. Norton—actually infusing with some passion the romance of the Roland who expired at Roncesvalles! But, being in an emotional mood to-night, the good lady broke down in the middle of “The Swiss Maid’s Song”—her yodelling ending almost in a sob. Then Elias Cobnor, after a leisurely tuning of his fiddle—an instrument that had belonged to the page-boy, his grandfather, played with considerable skill Paganini’s “Perpetual Movement,” and Spohr’s “Rose softly Blooming,” with elaborate variations.

When the fiddle lay again in its bed, Mr. Morgan rose, and the parrot once more cried: “Poetry!” To-night, since spring was here and the soul was full of strange longings, he recited Shelley’s “Ode

to the West Wind," and recited so well that the eyes of the listeners all turned to the window to watch the nodding of the tree-tops in the garden.

"If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" he concluded. "And now spring is here and I—and we feel young again—invigorated because of our dear friend's resolution."

Tryphena's clock—a grandfather's clock with a silvery bell—struck ten, and the guests prepared to depart. Tryphena cried out that they must not leave her yet—she was excited—she was too happy—she must be soothed before she was left alone. She flung open the door and pointed to the moon that floated over the Dale.

"Let us all walk in the garden," she said. "The grass is dry—the air's warm as at midsummer." She took two Chinese lanterns from the oak press, lighted their candles and hung them on the hawthorn in the middle of the lawn. The warmly coloured globes, the dark blue sky, the moon, the planets appealed to her artistic sense; she spoke of Watteau, of fêtes-champêtres, of the days when ladies wore brocaded hoops, and gentlemen tapped the lids of enamelled

snuff-boxes. Her elation enveloped them; they felt benefactors of their kind; they glowed with the knowledge of the service their encouragement of her genius would do the great world.

After eleven o'clock the breeze cooled, and the dew thickened on the finely-cut grass, and they knew that it was time to go bedward.

At parting Tryphena spoke of her natural fears. "I have been so very happy," she said wistfully; "so happy that I almost dread the thought of facing strangers—of hearing a different key. . . . I shall go to Saltlees next Wednesday—I mean to hire Cowper's old landau and carry my treasures with me. Do you think—do you think that on that evening we could all meet again—as we have done to-night—so that I might tell you of my adventures in the town?"

They thanked her gratefully. Mr. Morgan, for the first time, although he was always courtly, kissed her hand; Elias pressed her fingers with more warmth than he had ever shown; the two ladies embraced her as if she were a bride. When they were gone to their homes she carefully blew out the

lantern-lights and went indoors, the most fortunate, the happiest woman in all the country.

* * * *

The intervening days passed slowly, and the neighbours, when they met out-of-doors (they were not of the kind that makes informal visits), spoke with bated breath of the near future. After the glamour of that evening had faded, they began again to dread the result of Tryphena's venture. Not that she would ever be disloyal, ah, no! but the world—the world they knew so little of—must lay hands upon her. . . . No longer would the genius be theirs alone to admire; great folk—travelled folk would hail her comrade.

On the morning when Tryphena went to town, the friends escorted her in state to the rickety vehicle, where Cowper with careful hands had piled the pictures on the opposite seat. Mrs. Germain, though she was not superstitious, flung after the traveller an ancient white kid boot with elastic side-springs, which she hastened to recover, since it was a treasured relic—being, indeed, one of those she

had worn at her own wedding. When the sound of wheels had died away, both ladies blinked and tightened their lips and hurried indoors; whilst Mr. Morgan and Elias tottered off for a walk up Bole Hill, whence they might see in the far distance Tryphena crossing Darrand Bridge.

For that evening they donned their finest clothes, both Mrs. Germain and Miss Hubbard bringing to light pieces of yellowed point-lace that were only worn on very great occasions. Elias despoiled his garden of the finest Lent lilies—the retired school-master cut his window hyacinths and tulips—all for floral tributes. As Tryphena had not returned at six o'clock, they all went to the gate and sat on the rustic bench under the sycamore, talking restlessly, in subdued voices, as if they were present at a funeral.

At last came the sound of the return. When the gentlemen opened the wicket, they saw that the old driver looked very discomposed. He touched his white hat with his whip, and descended from the rusty box.

"Beggin' yor pardon, sirs," he said; "but Miss

Pauson's anything but well. At Badger House I thowt she'd fainted—she looked so bad! The land-lady made her rest a while and drink a sup o' sherry-wine. It fretted her to be late—that I could see."

Elias tore open the carriage door; inside they saw Tryphena huddled in a corner, her face ashen and her eyes dimmed with weeping. She held out two feeble hands; each took one and helped her to alight. On the opposite seat the pictures lay, just as in the morning. She motioned Cowper to carry them to the house; then she handed her netted purse to Elias.

"Pay Cowper for me," she said in a strained voice. "Give him something over——" Her voice quavered and broke; the ladies, letting fall their nosegays, fluttered forward with little cries of alarm.

Mrs. Germain's right arm went around her neck; Miss Hubbard's left arm around her waist; and for a few minutes their posture resembled that of three fair sisters grouped by Reynolds. Elias and Mr. Morgan saw not the grotesqueness but the beauty. Then, silently and very slowly all went into the house.

After they had placed her in her wicker-chair, and the widow had made her use the pierced silver vinaigrette, Miss Hubbard, being quite overcome, cried: "Oh, Tryphena, dear Tryphena, what is wrong—tell us so that we may help you?"

Tryphena bowed her head until her chin touched her bosom. "I am abased," she wailed. "All my pride is gone for ever." Her lips closed. "I can't tell you!" came incoherently—"I can't lose you!"

A long, long silence followed, then poor Tryphena, pressing heavily upon the arms of her chair, straightened her figure. "I won't be a coward," she muttered. "I daren't deceive you—I don't wish to deceive you. . . . The people who were arranging the exhibition looked at my pictures—looked and laughed and seemed to wonder if I came in earnest!"

The ladies gasped for breath; Mr. Morgan clenched his fists; Elias swore, but nobody heard.

"I can't tell you all they said—it's all blurred, like a horrible nightmare. Only they made me lose all faith in myself!"

Mrs. Germain took off Tryphena's Gainsborough hat and stroked her dishevelled curls. "But you

know 'twas jealousy," she said ; " they dared not let the other pictures be overshadowed——"

" Your judgment is better than that of insolent fools," added Miss Hubbard tenderly. " Oh, Tryphena ! Tryphena ! with your genius! . . . But your genius is too fine for the world ! "

" And there have been many such outrages," cried Mr. Morgan savagely. " There was poor Keats—I could find a hundred instances. Thank God that it's no worse, say I, and that you're safely back with those who know and understand ! The wicked folly of it ! "

Elias swore again, quite audibly ; and though he was famed for temperate speech none of his hearers was shocked. And Tryphena, seeing her little kingdom still loyal, sighed again and again with happy relief. The light came back to her eyes, the glow to her cheeks.

" Oh, it is good to be with you again ! " she cried. " It is good to be back in my beautiful cage ! "

THE END.

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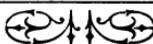
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